MICHAEL GARVEY
TV 'JESUS'

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

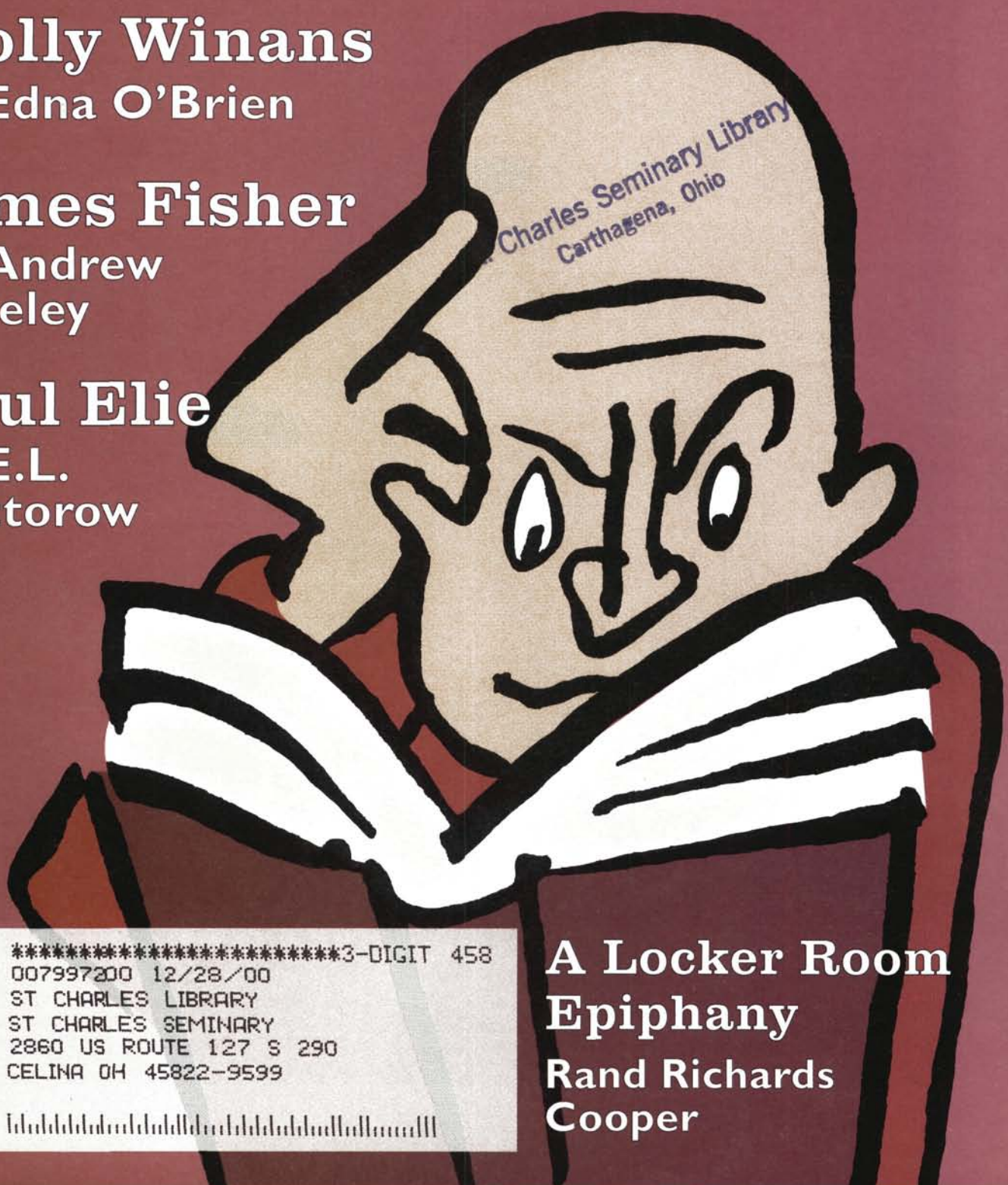
May 5, 2000

Spring Books

Molly Winans
on Edna O'Brien

James Fisher
on Andrew Greeley

Paul Elie
on E.L. Doctorow



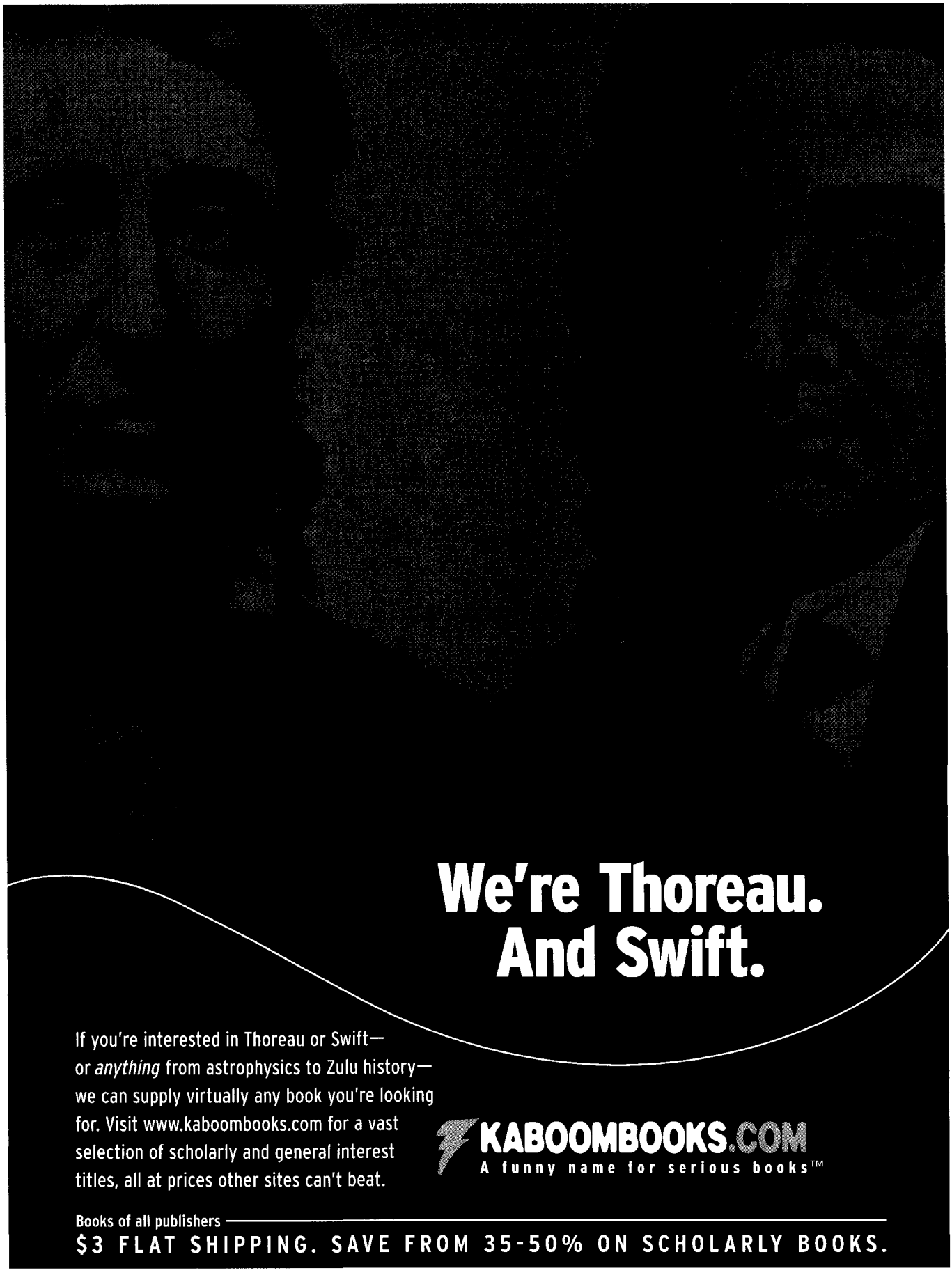
St. Charles Seminary Library
Carthagena, Ohio

$2.50 US
($3.50 CAN)

**********3-DIGIT 458
007997200 12/28/00
ST CHARLES LIBRARY
ST CHARLES SEMINARY
2860 US ROUTE 127 S 290
CELINA OH 45822-9599

A Locker Room Epiphany
Rand Richards Cooper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


We're Thoreau.
And Swift.
If you're interested in Thoreau or Swift—
or *anything* from astrophysics to Zulu history—
we can supply virtually any book you're looking
for. Visit www.kaboombooks.com for a vast
selection of scholarly and general interest
titles, all at prices other sites can't beat.
KABOOMBOOKS.COM
A funny name for serious books™
Books of all publishers
$3 FLAT SHIPPING. SAVE FROM 35-50% ON SCHOLARLY BOOKS.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FOUNDED 1924

COMMONWEAL

May 5, 2000 / Volume CXXVII, Number 9

UPFRONT

Correspondence *Hillenbrand, Prop. 22, & more* 4

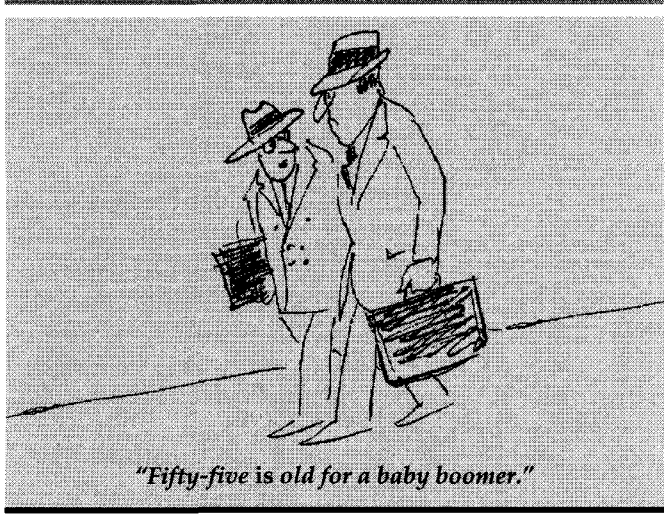
Editorial *Colombia conundrum* 5

COLUMNISTS

Not your standard Auntie
Jo McGowan 7

Is the tax revolt over?
E.J. Dionne, Jr. 8

ARTICLES



"Fifty-five is old for a baby boomer."

MEN OF A CERTAIN AGE
Rand Richards Cooper
On the basketbal court or in the whirlpool, the body's inexorable destiny will not be denied. 9

RELIGION & THE MODERN NOVEL
Mark Krupnick
Opening our eyes and ears to the religious preconceptions of modern writers 11

POETRY

Listening for Language
Steve Wilson 14

THE LAST WORD

Dance marathon
Edward T. Wheeler 31

VERDICTS

SCREEN

The novelist & the director
Paul Baumann
Did Neil Jordan's version of 'The End of the Affair' betray Graham Greene's intent? 15

MEDIA

'Jesus' on CBS
Michael O. Garvey
The lamest story ever told. Honest. 17

SPRING BOOKS

Wild Decembers
by Edna O'Brien
Molly Winans 19

The Catholic Imagination
by Andrew M. Greeley
James T. Fisher 20

City of God
by E.L. Doctorow
Paul Elie 22

The Paradox of American Democracy
by John Judis
Democracy Derailed
by David Broder
Kevin Mattson 24

The Book of Miracles
by Kenneth L. Woodward
Luke Timothy Johnson 26

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To the Editors

Egan & Hillenbrand

Albert Schorsch III's letter [Correspondence, April 7] lends a certain credence to the old saying that no good deed ever goes unpunished. Monsignor Jack Egan performed a very good deed in visiting Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand [*see Commonweal*, March 10] for the sole purpose of trying to lift his spirits at a time when Reynie was widely reported to be in deep depression. Maybe I have missed something, having been away from Chicago for sixty years, but I have never heard anyone suggest either directly or indirectly that Egan's purpose in visiting Hillenbrand was to garner a degree of validation for Egan's point of view. In my opinion, this allegation is very unfair to Egan.

To round out *Commonweal*'s treatment of the Hillenbrand era, it might be useful to note that Hillenbrand's ecclesiology (like that of almost all of his contemporaries) was papalist, for lack of a better term, and fell somewhat short of Vatican II's emphasis on a more collegial style of church leadership.

I would hate to think that offering this observation might be interpreted by some as being disrespectful to the memory of a truly great priest—surely one of the greatest priests of his generation in the United States.

(MONSIGNOR) GEORGE G. HIGGINS
Washington, D.C.

Thanks for the ammo

John Garvey's "The Hidden God" [April 7] was brilliant. Recently I have been involved in a discussion group studying world religions. Many members of the group are atheists or agnostics, and all are anti-Catholic. I am grateful for Garvey's sensitive insights which address my own difficulties with believing and offer, as well, suggestions about how I can best respond to the prejudice and misunderstandings of others. Perfect timing.

Eric Stoltz's "Signs of the Times" in the same issue gave me much to ponder, and was a challenge to examine knee-jerk reactions to same-sex marriage. Thank you all for a wonderful magazine. PHYLLIS TOWNLEY
Marion, Mass.

Against gay marriage

Civil marriage as a descendant of sacred, holy, ritualistic marriage has been subjected to extensive corruption over time, as the article by Eric Stoltz ["Signs of the Times," April 7] points out. This has resulted in a blurring of the promise and the responsibilities accepted by oath, before witnesses, by a man and a woman. Should the blurring of meaning be increased to the point where the obligations become meaningless and the event turned into a charade?

In a March plebicite, most of the citizens of California (61 percent) said that the community should define what civil marriage is and that the blurring of distinctions should stop. The only rights and privileges of civil marriage that Stoltz seems to covet are the rights of inheritance and the legal power to make health-care decisions for another of the same sex. I have always understood that both of these issues could be easily taken care of through the use of wills, trusts, and partnerships, and have nothing to do with sex.

I am willing to accept gays as they are and, with hope, look forward to the day when they will be freed from the burden they must carry. In the mean time, I ask them not to further corrupt our rituals. JAMES H. TRUMBO
Port Angeles, Wash.

'No' on 22

Recently, while looking for something else in a back issue of *America* [March 28, 1998], I reread the article "Notes from a Community Catholic and Gay" by Eric Stoltz. I was impressed then and am now by his picture of the gay community in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

His article "Signs of the Times" in *Commonweal* [April 7] is a sad reflection of the effect on that community of Proposition 22—the "protect marriage" initiative supported by Cardinal Roger Mahony and the bishops of California. I do not appreciate that they contributed a reported $310,000 to promote the proposition. As a California Catholic, they did not represent me by so doing.

I hope to see more commentary by Eric Stoltz, and I wish him well.

VIRGINIA FAULKNER
Orange, Calif.

Abortion and 'Cider'

The editorial regarding the film *The Cider House Rules* [March 24] ends with a poignant and profound statement, "We cannot make up the rules

(Continued on page 28)

"Experimenting with tradition since 1898..."

For information about the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement, contact:

Vocation Director
Graymoor
PO Box 300
Garrison, NY 10524-0300
914 424 3671

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STAFF

Editor: **Margaret O'Brien Steinfels**
Executive Editor: **Paul Baumann**
Managing Editor: **Patrick Jordan**
Associate Editor: **Daria Donnelly**
Production Editor: **Tiina Aleman**
Senior Writer: **Robert G. Hoyt**
Editorial Assistant: **Maurice Timothy Reidy**
Copy Editor: **Susanne Washburn**
Business Manager: **Gregory Wilpert**
Poetry: **Rosemary Deen**
Screen: **Richard Alleva** *Stage/Media:* **Celia Wren** *Columnists:* **John Garvey, E.J. Dionne, Jr., Sidney Callahan, William Pfaff, Daniel Callahan, Jo McGowan**
Intern: **Christopher Ruddy**
Circulation Manager: **Sandra Smith**
Staff: **Quanda Williams**
Advertising Manager: **Ruth E. Taylor**
Publisher Emeritus: **Edward S. Skillin**

Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly except Christmas/New Year's; and monthly July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: commonweal@msn.com. Web: http://www.commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, ME 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 475 Riverside Dr. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Commonweal, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 405, New York, NY 10115.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles also are available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic data bases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional offices.
Copyright © 2000 Commonweal Foundation.
Single Copy, $2.50. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $44; Canada, $47; foreign, $50. Special two-year rate: U.S. $75; Canada, $81; foreign, $87. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $84; Europe, $89; other parts of the world, $99. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Illustrations: Cover design: Christopher Young; cover art: Charlot; pp. 3, 31, Ross, Rothco; pp. 3, 17, courtesy CBS; pp. 6, 9, Baloo, Rothco; p. 7, Engleman, Rothco; p. 8, Renault, Rothco; pp. 11, 19, Valerry; p. 15, Karsh; p. 20, Corbett, Rothco; p. 24, Schwadron, Rothco; columnist portraits, Elaine Mills.

http://www.commonwealmagazine.org

Colombia conundrum

Colombia is one of the most violent places in the world. Kidnappings, political murders, pervasive drug trafficking, corruption, and a deepening economic recession wrack the country. Many fear that the nation, torn between leftist guerillas, right-wing private armies, and a military with a history of brutality, is on the verge of collapse. Hope resides in a growing peace movement that has mobilized millions of ordinary Colombians and helped elect a president, Andrés Pastrana, who has pursued a negotiated peace among the factions.

Next month the U.S. Senate is likely to approve a $1.6-billion aid package for Colombia, four-fifths of which is designated as military assistance. The Clinton administration sees the aid, which Pastrana has requested, as crucial to the "drug war." In Peru and Bolivia, the interdiction of drug smugglers and the destruction of coca fields (cocaine is made from the coca leaf), combined with UN-sponsored efforts encouraging farmers to plant alternative crops, have significantly reduced the amount of coca grown there. As a consequence, Colombia has become the source for 80 percent of the world's cocaine. The Clinton administration thinks that the Colombian armed forces, given the resources and training needed, can get to the coca fields and destroy them. If the United States does nothing, advocates of aid say, not only will the flood of cocaine increase, but the chance for survival of Colombia's democracy, the oldest in Latin America, will become even more perilous.

There are good reasons to be skeptical about how the aid package is designed and what its prospects for success may be. Critics argue that the $1-billion increase in aid is not aimed primarily at drug interdiction, but is a recipe for U.S. entanglement in the thirty-five-year civil war between Marxist guerillas in the south and the corrupt oligarchy that controls the government in Bogota. Many worry that U.S. complicity in the atrocious human-rights record of the Colombian military is sure to be one result of greater involvement. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) has warned that "What we are seeing is a dramatic ratcheting up of a counterinsurgency policy in the name of counterdrug policy."

It is impossible, however, to completely separate counterdrug from counterinsurgency efforts in Colombia. The large coca-growing areas of southern Colombia are controlled by the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), who extract $500 million annually in "protection" fees from coca growers. Few observers take the FARC's political agenda seriously (it executed three American human-rights workers last year), but its fifteen-thousand-person army cannot be ignored. President Pastrana has already made significant concessions to the FARC, and the United States supports a negotiated settlement to the conflict. But the guerrillas' recent military successes and fat bank account have given them little incentive to come to an agreement with the government. The military-aid package, which includes thirty Blackhawk helicopters and the creation of three specially trained battalions (5,000 troops) of the Colombian army, will pay for a campaign against FARC-controlled coca fields. Knowledgeable observers, and many of the Colombians who favor a negotiated peace, think that military pressure is needed to bring the FARC to the bargaining table.

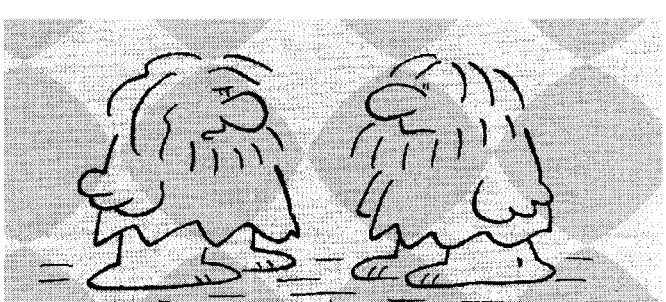
U.S. law stipulates that aid cannot go to military forces involved in human-rights

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

violations. The U.S.-trained antidrug battalions are supposed to exclude Colombian military units suspected of such abuses. Whether or not these safeguards will prevent future atrocities is the crucial question. Historically, the Colombian military has been largely outside the control of elected officials, and the army's ties to right-wing paramilitary groups, many of which are also involved in drug smuggling, complicates the picture further. The government has indicted some paramilitary leaders, but Colombia's judicial system remains corrupt and unaccountable. Reform of the judiciary is essential if there is to be any hope of long-term stability. It must be made clear to Colombia's military that if it is unwilling to forsake the use of terror, further U.S. aid is out of the question.

There are no easy answers to Colombia's problems or to the question of how the United States can best assist the forces of democracy in the region. At times corruption appears so ubiquitous that any greater U.S. involvement seems futile. (Even the wife of a former commander of the U.S. Army's military activities in Colombia has pled guilty to drug-smuggling charges!) Yet Colombia's proximity to the Panama Canal, and its civil war's displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians, make Colombia's stability of vital national interest to the United States. Pastrana rejects direct U.S. military involvement, but argues that, because the United States is the principal market for Colombia's cocaine, the United States has a moral responsibility to help Colombians wrest control of their country from the drug cartels. Moreover, the bravery of ordinary Colombians in the face of terror calls out for a generous response. In that light, the U.S. Catholic bishops have issued a statement that deserves attention. Ultimately, the bishops note, Colombia's fate depends on how well the United States comes to terms with its own drug problem. In the short term, however, Colombia needs our assistance. U.S. military aid, the bishops write, must be carefully monitored and conditioned on respect for human rights. Moreover, military assistance must be coupled with support for the peace process and democratic reforms, substantial humanitarian assistance, and "vigorous efforts" to help farmers with alternatives to the cultivation of coca and poppies.

Will increased U.S. aid work? No one really knows. With the proper safeguards, greater U.S. involvement can be a force for peace and stability. Without those safeguards, nothing of lasting value will be achieved.



"I don't have anything against the Neanderthals, but I don't see why we should have to send them foreign aid!"

COMMONWEAL

Tired of Making Millions?

Join the *Commonweal* staff!

Commonweal is looking for a new business manager. A terrific job for a Renaissance person: someone with business and promotion skills committed to working with a small staff and a limited budget to ensure the financial future of the magazine. Previous experience with a magazine, small business, and/or nonprofit organization is a plus.

The business manager works with the staff on a wide variety of tasks. These include budgeting and finance, marketing and promotion, circulation, fundraising, development, and general business matters, as well as supervising the business staff. We did mean Renaissance! Much of the office has recently been computerized: accounting and financial records are maintained on QuickBooks and our in-house circulation system uses the NexTech system (training will be provided if applicant can begin by July 3). Knowledge of MS Excel and Access are necessary.

Interested applicants should send a résumé and a letter describing his or her qualifications and acquaintance, if any, with the magazine. Please include references and salary requirements. Four-day workweek. Benefits: Employer-funded health insurance and pension plan.

Readers are invited to join in our search by passing on this announcement or by letting us know of potential candidates.

Applications or suggestions should be sent to:

commonweal@msn.com

or

Editor

Commonweal

475 Riverside Drive, Room 405

New York, NY 10115

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JO McGOWAN

NOT YOUR STANDARD AUNTIE

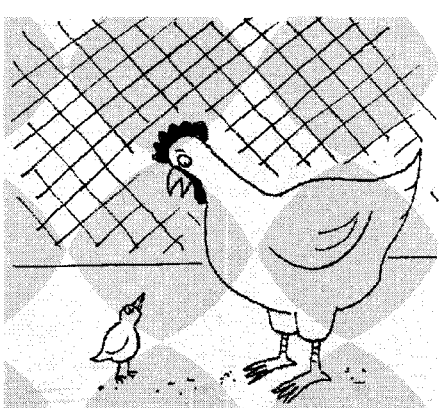
She lived by her own rules

April is the cruelest month, according to T.S. Eliot. I have never believed it, since it contains the birthdays of three of my favorite people. But after this year, I just might agree. On April 1, the day and the month barely begun, I got a call here in India from my sister in the United States saying that our Aunt Sheila, Mom's younger sister and my godmother, had had a stroke and wasn't expected to live. The next day, I learned that she had died that morning.

In India, maternal aunts are very special people. In Hindi, which has a different name for every relation, a mother's sister is called *Masi*. The colloquial translation is "just like mother." My *Masi* was not just like my mother, and yet there is a fierceness about the love I have for her that places her in that pantheon. For days the past has been clicking through my mind like slides in a projector, each image a celebration of the life of this remarkable woman. Aunt Sheila and my mother and her twin sister were born in England. Their parents, the MacGills, were both novelists and very much a part of the literary scene of London in the early part of the century. (G.K. Chesterton was my mother's godfather.) In 1929, my grandfather was invited to give a series of lectures in America and the family accompanied him on the tour. They had just arrived in California when the stock market crashed; overnight, the lecture tour evaporated and they were left stranded and penniless.

Because their novel-writing parents were almost comically inept in worldly matters, the three little girls grew up very fast. When my mother and her twin were just ten, and my Aunt Sheila seven, they published and sold a small hand-printed neighborhood newspaper. The money earned was sometimes all the family had to buy food with. That same year, Aunt Sheila appeared in the Academy Award-winning film *Cavalcade*. Her immortal one line was, "I don't want to be the Boers." Years later, she and my mother moved to New York City. There they fell under the spell of the Baroness de Hueck Doherty's Friendship House, and later Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker. Moved by the idea of houses of hospitality, they opened one in their own apartment and took in a long series of homeless women, all the while holding down full-time jobs themselves. When, after five years, my mother left the city to marry my father, Aunt Sheila continued running the house on her own for several more years, until finally marrying Leo Callahan and settling down to raise her own four children.

"Settling down" is just a phrase, of course. Certainly it does not describe the life Aunt Sheila led. Babies took up a lot of her time, but didn't stop her from working at a series of jobs (from a switchboard operator to an editorial assistant in a large Manhattan writers' agency). She also continued her involvement in the "underground church," as it was known in those days. I must have been no more than ten when she took me to Mass at Emmaus House, the radical Catholic community in East Harlem that flourished in the '60s. She and Uncle Leo hosted Masses and discussion groups in their apartment, and welcomed interminable processions of students, peace activists, and lost souls. There was a place for everyone—including a large collection of cats.



"Never shout 'the sky is falling' unless the sky is really falling."

In her mid-sixties, long past the age most people are dreaming of retirement, while still working in the writers' agency, Aunt Sheila decided to take up the family trade (both her sisters were published writers). She began with children's books, and quickly achieved success, publishing four within a few years, all with Dial. In between, she also spun two mystery novels; Saint Martin's Press published both of them.

The above is all by way of introduction. But how to convey the formidable nature of her personality, the imperious way she strode through life? When I heard that she had had a stroke, I was more taken aback than anything else: Aunt Sheila? How did God dare? There was a magnificent confidence about her, a wonderful certainty about her place in the world that somehow had the effect of making all of us sure of ourselves. We were related to her, were we not? My favorite Aunt Sheila story occurred when she was around sixteen. She had gone to the beach with her friend Lois. It was a public beach, very crowded and not terribly clean. But just a short distance from where they were camped was an exclusive private club. The two girls climbed over the rock wall dividing the two and settled in happily on the deserted white sands. Within minutes, a waiter from the club appeared and said haughtily "Ladies, this is a private club. I am going to have to ask you to leave immediately."

Aunt Sheila drew herself up to her full height (she was very tall, and also drop-dead gorgeous) and said, "I am Sheila MacGill and this is my friend Lois."

"Oh, Madame," the waiter said, all flustered and apologetic. "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't realize."

It was so typical of her: the absolute truth—I can't imagine her lying—and totally irrelevant. She lived by her own set of rules and she believed in creating

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her life according to them, not by any arbitrary standards the world threw at her. The example of a free and independent woman that she gave to me, my sisters, her own daughters, and who knows how many others, has given us a strength we are only now beginning to recognize and draw upon. The idea that women could not be priests, for instance, she treated as beneath contempt, not even worth discussing.

When I turned forty, she called to wish me a happy birthday and to congratulate me on reaching what she said was the best age of all. "Old enough to know what you want and young enough to enjoy it," she said in her deep, slightly sultry voice. I had looked forward to telling her how right she was, but it doesn't really matter: she already knew. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

E.J. DIONNE, Jr.

IS THE TAX REVOLT OVER?

Let's look at the bottom line

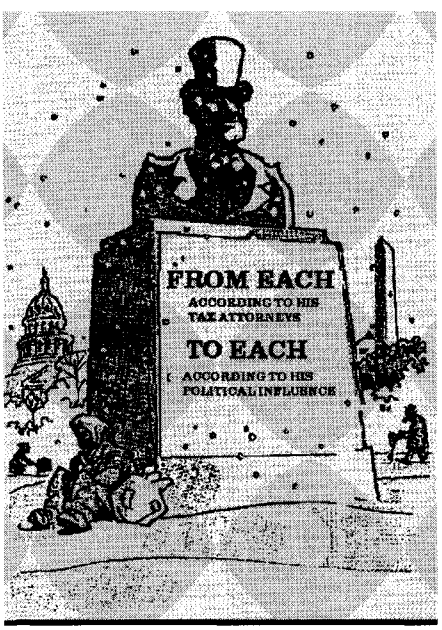
April 15 has come and gone without much noise from the antitax movement. That represents a big political shift. The year 2000 is not the year 1978, when the last tax revolt hit full stride with the passage of California's tax-cutting Proposition 13. A popular upheaval against taxes helped create the majorities that made Ronald Reagan president.

The rebellion against taxes has abated because, for most Americans, taxes are not the burden they were in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. Middle- and lower-income Americans are paying *less* in federal income taxes now than they were two decades ago. The tax rates on the wealthy have gone up, but their after-tax incomes have gone up, too.

Those lobbying for a big tax cut emphasize a different number. They'll say, correctly, that the federal government is taking a larger share of the economy in taxes (roughly 20 percent) than it's taken at any time since World War II. Over the last quarter-century, this number has hovered between 17.2 percent and 20.3 percent, and it's on the high-end now.

What's changed is the distribution of the tax burden. Ronald Reagan's tax cuts of the early 1980s and the 1986 tax reform combined with Bill Clinton's tax policies to shift the income-tax burden away from people in the middle and at the bottom of the economic ladder. Reagan cut taxes across the board. The Clinton tax plan of 1993 raised the top rates on the wealthy, but it also gave tax cuts and subsidies (through the Earned Income Tax Credit) to the poorest of working Americans.

Here's the result: According to Treasury Department figures, the average federal income-tax rate on a family of four at the median income was 7.5 percent in 1999, down from 11.8 percent at its peak in 1981. The median family's income-tax rate, as my Brookings Institution colleague Bill Gale points out, is the lowest it's been since 1966. The median, now at roughly $46,700, is smack in the middle of the middle class: half of all families earn above it, half below it.



Families closer to the bottom—those earning half of the median income—have never had it so good where income taxes are concerned. Their income-tax rate is now *negative*. They get more in subsidies from the Earned Income Tax Credit than they pay in income taxes.

Even the better-off parts of the middle class aren't doing badly. Families earning twice the median are paying 14.1 percent, down from 19.1 percent in 1981.

But somebody is paying the bills. A churning stock market has produced a lot of capital-gains taxes, and the well-off are paying more. The share of income taxes paid by the top one-fifth of earners has risen steadily: It was 68 percent in 1983, 72 percent in 1987, and 79 percent in 1999. The share of the income tax take from the top 1 percent, the truly wealthy, has gone from 20 percent in 1983 to 29 percent now.

The middle class and the poor aren't off the hook. Their burden is in payroll taxes. If political candidates proposed cuts in the payroll tax rather than the income tax, they might win a stronger, if still muffled, response. But most of them, including George W. Bush, focus on big income tax cuts for top earners. No wonder Bush says over and over that his plan to cut income taxes is a sign of courage because it's *un*popular. He's right about its lack of political reach. For most Americans, the income tax isn't the burden it once was.

Even the best-off, who would no doubt like an income tax-cut, have reason for prudence. The Congressional Budget Office finds that in inflation-adjusted dollars, the *after-tax* incomes of the top 1 percent have risen by 24 percent since 1987—from $379,712 then to $471,664 now. Polls suggest that many among the well-off are willing to keep taxes where they are, as long as the economy (and their incomes) keep growing.

All of this helps explain why big tax cuts don't work for politicians now the way they did for Ronald Reagan. On Election Day these numbers will matter. □

© 2000, Washington Post Writers Group

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MEN OF A CERTAIN AGE

What I saw in the whirlpool

Rand Richards Cooper

It was as a teen-ager that I first read *The Great Gatsby* and Nick Carraway's oft-quoted, haunting line about middle age—the thinning list of friends, the thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair. How strange to go back and find that he was talking about turning thirty. When you're thirty, that's unsettling. At forty, it's outrageous.

Middle age is one of those places, I guess, that look pretty good when you're leaving; but the arrival can be rough. Age, we reassure ourselves, is a state of mind—while mass culture screams it's a state of hairline (even Nick knew that), a state of waistline, a state of jowl.

Last year I joined the local Jewish Community Center. I'm not Jewish, but the JCC has a gym, where twice a week I go to support a stubborn basketball habit. At forty I play in what is gently called the "Veterans League," soldiering on in the mind-body war whose chief spoil is the delusion of grace. And it is a delusion. My friend Rich tells about watching a tape of one of our games. "There was a loose ball on the floor, and here were these stumpy guys who couldn't bend, waving at it." That's us all right, the wavers, the no-longer-bendables. After a couple of hours on the courts you'll find me groaning away in the JCC whirlpool, jets of heated water blasting my distressed lower lumbars.

Age is a state of back.

The JCC is a family place. Mothers push strollers, grandparents follow behind—all the generations together under one roof. One moment you feel young, the next...not so young. At the pool there's an attendant, a college-aged girl I chat with—not flirtatious conversations, but also not entirely free of those anxious monitorings by which a man at forty tries to reassure himself he's still on the radar, still registering. As I came in the other day she was sitting with Brian, a guy in his twenties I've played with in pickup hoop games. Brian had the beginnings of a beard, and I kidded him about it. I asked the girl what she thought. She made a face.

"See?" I said to him. "Why cover up those cherubic good looks?"

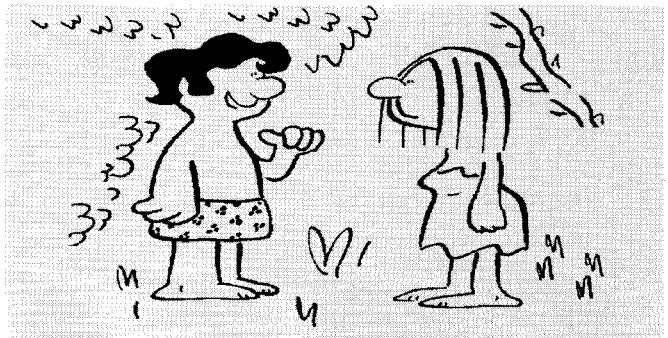
"Cherubic," Brian repeated, smiling. And it hit me, here was age bantering with youth, across a friendly divide. It was so fundamentally diplomatic. The nations of age, negotiating their way in the world.

In the locker room, that most intimate of places, the age nations stick close together. This is more than a matter of shared interests and conversation. There's also a shared physical familiarity, a personal comfort zone. One tends to feel ill at ease, I've noticed, among bodies much older or younger than one's own. Like the recent UConn basketball player who works out at the gym, and whose physique is that of a Greek god. A small dread rises in me whenever he takes a locker near mine, because that's always when I catch a glimpse of myself in the big mirror across the room. Is that really me next to Achilles, sucking up my gut like William Shatner?

Then there are the older men. Their bodies are pear-shaped and slack, and scarred from surgeries; one man wears a colostomy bag. You're aware of not looking. A subtle discomfort builds, which someone dispels with a gesture of humor—again, that diplomacy. One of the old men comes from the shower, hunched over, his back flaming red; clearly he's been scalding his aches away. "You know, I saw a lobster that exact same color in a restaurant," a guy my age jokes to him. "Glad you're not carrying a cup of melted butter, I might get hungry!" Everyone laughs, grateful.

It's all about aging, this impulse not to look. We pass it off as granting privacy, but really it's a reluctance to see oneself in those other bodies—the robust and the frail, those pitiless glimpses of past and future. I'm reminded of lines from a Philip Larkin poem:

Truly, though our element is time,
We are not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant in our lives.
They link us to our losses....



"Hi, me Tarzan...But enough about me..."

Rand Richards Cooper, *a frequent contributor, is the author of* The Last to Go *and* Big as Life. *He lives in Hartford, Connecticut.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who doesn't feel a shudder, confronting Time the Vandal? So we affect a rueful bravado. I'm the same weight I was ten years ago, guys my age joke—there's just been a slight redistribution!

Levity takes aim against gravity, but let's face it, we all know we're being pulled down. That's the rub, of course: facing it. We're only human; and as Larkin's poem reminds us, nothing is more human than looking away. The man with the colostomy bag walks by on his way from the showers, and a friend of mine leans over to me, wincing. "You gotta admire the guy," he whispers, "but do I really want to see that?"

One evening recently I entered the locker room to find it empty save for an elderly man in a wheelchair. In his bathing suit he sat, slumped over; his right hand, curled in at the wrist, tremored. A stroke? Parkinson's? When I asked if he needed a push, he shook his head, slurring incomprehensible words, and peered out with resigned frustration.

A few other men drifted in. So too did a little boy—a tiny, scrawny boy, all of maybe four or five, in a wet bathing suit. He opened a locker, then another and another. He was so thin you could see every muscle and bone.

"Looking for your clothes?" I asked. "Where did you leave them?"

"Number one!" he said. "But now it's not." He was still at that age where pieces of language float up in curious patterns. Shivering, he went from locker to locker, frowning broadly. A couple of us helped him, and finally we located his clothes—they'd been there all along, not in a locker but right there on a bench, a tiny sweatshirt and pair of nylon sweatpants. Now he put them on and ran happily off without a word.

Taking my towel, I went out to the pool and swam a few lazy laps, then climbed into the whirlpool nearby. Far overhead, skylights gave on the black of frigid winter, a scrim of frosty snow along the edges. It was obscurely thrilling to be this warm with that much cold so close by. I thought about the little boy, and tried to remember a world so big and strange that your clothes could get up and walk away from where you left them, and men loomed so huge that you would as likely thank them as you would a tree—less likely, even.

Off to my left, the locker room door opened, interrupting my thoughts, and the man in the wheelchair appeared, wheeled in by a JCC employee. He was joined by a half dozen others, a convoy of wheelchair riders, all in bathing suits. I'd noticed before that the adjustable floor of the training pool had been raised all the way to surface level, the water drained off. Now one by one the wheelchair people rolled their way out. At the control panel their teacher pushed a button, and I watched as they sank, inch by slow inch, water welling up around them.

Then came a marvelous reversal. At a depth of about three feet, the teacher pushed a button, stopping the floor.

And the old people rose from their wheelchairs.

It looked like a miracle, the way they simply floated free, drifting, paddling, standing. Even the man I had seen in the locker room was standing now, braced against one side of the pool.

Sitting there in the whirlpool, I felt myself moved almost to tears. It was as if, in the space of a few minutes, I'd had the whole of life laid out before me, from the scrawny little boy whose speech was just finding itself, to the scrawny old man speech had deserted. I thought about my parents, now in their early seventies, still hale but voyaging steadily into old age. I thought about the boy I myself had once been, and the YMCA I'd gone to for swim lessons, a dank dim place where a Mr. Hume sat behind the front desk, a Don Knotts character, eternally beleaguered, now certainly long dead.

Finally, I thought about the old man I would one day become—incredibly but surely, as sure as I sat here breathing. And for this one moment, the poem of Larkin's seemed to offer too pessimistic a take on our capacity for seeing life whole. Here it was, after all, the long perspective opening before me—past, present, and future, time's holy trinity; and I didn't turn away. I felt linked not merely to losses, as Larkin writes, but to gains. Yes, it was outrageous to ponder all that would be taken; but wasn't it at least as outrageous that it had been given in the first place?

I was, literally, middle-aged, half way, in all likelihood, from mystery to mystery. And for once, this much lamented, much joked-about, much dreaded passage seemed not a curse but a blessing. □

The Cardinal Suenens Program in Theology & Church Life

is pleased to announce awardees for The Margaret F. Grace Summer Research Grants for the Year 2000

Gilles Routhier,
Université Laval, Québec,
"Cardinal Suenens' Major Contribution to the Reception of Vatican II"

Jared Wicks, S.J.,
Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome
"Divine Revelation in the Developing Formulation of the Schema De revelatione at Vatican II, 1963-1965"

We invite applications for awards for the Summer 2001. Contact us at www.suenens.org or via e-mail: suenens@jcu.edu

John Carroll University
University Heights, OH 44118
Phone: 216-397-4991 ■ Fax: 216-397-1771
Professor Doris Donnelly, program director
Ms. Darlene Morales, program secretary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RELIGION & THE MODERN NOVEL

What my Japanese students helped me see

Mark Krupnick

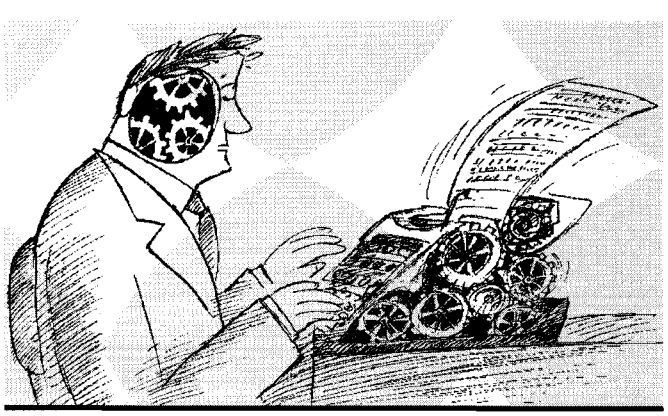
I have spent the last two summers teaching English literature to Japanese adults who come to the University of Chicago to finish their work for a master's degree the university offers in Japan. I had some broad goals as to what I wanted to do for my students, partly to justify the colossal expense (in hope as well as money) they had gone to in making their very long journey. I wanted to clarify certain organizing themes of the courses (religion and the novel one summer, gender relations in modern literature last summer). But I also wanted to teach them about certain aspects of American culture, and I wanted to help them improve their skills in reading literature and help them with their English. I thought the assigned texts, which included Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, and Joan Didion's *Book of Common Prayer*, would serve these goals in interesting ways.

I wanted some things for myself as well. I wanted to learn about my students by becoming involved with them as persons. This was possible because these were mature people, ranging in age from their late twenties to around fifty. I had a specifically literary way by which I thought I might arrive at a kind of anthropological knowledge. I asked them to be especially attentive to moments in the assigned texts when characters said or did things that surprised them, things quite different from what persons in Japan might have said or done in similar circumstances. I have found that, as a literary critic, illumination begins when you are flummoxed by something in a text. These are the moments when you stop finding only what you already know or have already read—when you cease gazing at your own image in the mirror. It's in unexpected and estranging moments that we have the chance to transcend ourselves and arrive at a new understanding. I imagined that the Japanese students would experience many such moments in reading the works I had assigned.

I was wrong. It was very hard for my students to report on their experience in this way. There are probably many reasons that my exercise in amateur anthropology was a bust. One is that Japanese culture confers great authority on the teacher. This means in practice that my students were waiting to see what I thought and were skeptical about the usefulness of their own impressions. There were other reasons having to do with Japanese attitudes but also with my students' lack of experience as readers. You have to be an advanced reader to feel confident about your experience of gaps in a text. The anxious novice reader will tend to minimize any anomalies that are encountered.

If my experiment in literary anthropology did not lead me into the heart of Japanese culture, it did force me to rethink where and how I might learn about my guests. In the process I discovered what Americans and other Westerners have often discovered in thinking about how to present European and American literature to Asian readers. I learned, willy-nilly, that my students were deeply acculturated to certain Western ideas and values—McDonald's and high tech make us kin—but tone-deaf on other wavelengths. As a consequence, I read and taught these books in a different way than I do when I teach American students. I found myself teaching self-consciously as an American and as a representative of Western civilization. Set down like that, my formulation looks pretentious to me. Put more simply, an American is not likely to learn much about foreigners and their culture by teaching British and American literature to people from other countries. What he is likely to learn concerns that literature itself and the culture (his own) in which it is embedded. And, because he too is embedded in that culture, he stands a chance of learning something of value about himself. (I use the masculine pronoun not because the learning is possible only for men but because I am talking about what happened to me.)

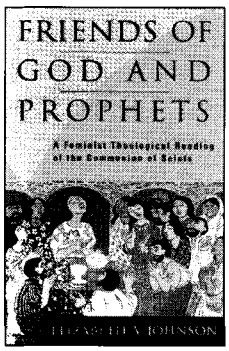
Let me explain in more detail. In the summer of 1998 I taught a section on religion and the modern novel. I enjoyed the experience but was often frustrated because I had only five students in the class. Anticipating that women students



Mark Krupnick *teaches English literature at the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is the author of* Lionel Trilling and the Fate of Cultural Criticism.

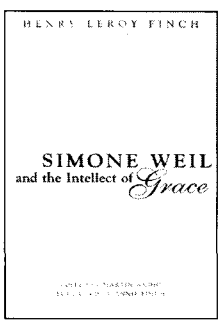
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINNER OF THE 1999 AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGIONS AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION, CONSTRUCTIVE-REFLECTIVE STUDIES CATEGORY



Elizabeth A. Johnson
Friends of God and Prophets
A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints
"Following a talented theologian in the skillful exercise of her craft generates genuine excitement. And Johnson is skilled, both in the architectonic sweep of her work and in her careful attention to detail." —*Commonweal*
320 pp • 0-8264-1198-3 • $19.95 pbk

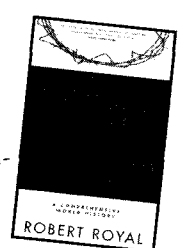
Henry Leroy Finch
Simone Weil and the Intellect of Grace
Edited by Martin Andic
Foreword by Annie Finch
A thoughtful examination of Weil's contribution to twentieth century philosophical and religious thought.
256 pp • 0-8264-1190-8 • $29.95 hbd



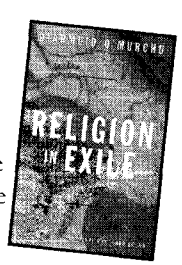
Continuum
The Continuum International Publishing Group
www.continuumbooks.com • 800-561-7704

New Releases...

Robert Royal
The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century
A Comprehensive World History
Historical surveys of eighteen political regimes under which martyrdom occurred, including the USSR and Latin America. Contains moving biographical portraits of key protagonists.
0-8245-1846-2 $39.95 hc, illustrated



Diarmuid O'Murchu
Religion in Exile
An inspiring contribution to the evolving spiritual consciousness of our time and an invaluable resource for those trying to make sense of the new spiritual awakening.
0-8245-1841-1 $15.95 pb



THE CROSSROAD PUBLISHING COMPANY
481 Eighth Avenue, Suite 1550, New York, NY 10001
At your bookstore or call **1-800-395-0690.**

might be more interested in gender roles than in religion, last summer I changed my topic and wound up with twelve students. The surprising thing is that this course, supposed to be about gender roles, turned out to be about religion also. This was especially true for Muriel Spark's comic masterpiece, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Miss Brodie is an eccentric spinster and schoolteacher in 1930s Edinburgh. Initially, I was interested in her relationship to her "set," the ten-year-olds who idolize their wildly eccentric teacher in their otherwise constricted all-girls' school. My students handled those issues with relative ease but were often stymied by the way in which religion shapes Spark's story.

Spark was raised in Calvinist Edinburgh and in this novel she looks back at her own Scottish childhood. She looks back as one who has escaped from Edinburgh and converted to Catholicism. At one point she has a character say that Miss Brodie's moral obliquity in pushing one of her girls, now a teen-ager, to become the lover of the school's art teacher has its origin in Miss Brodie's mistaking herself for the God of Calvin. In Spark's view, Miss Brodie is no god but a self-deceived, self-intoxicated spinster who is using her girls to give order and emotional intensity to her life. Miss Brodie's idealization of Mussolini's Fascists only reveals the soft spots in her romantic aestheticism. Among the several virtues Miss Brodie lacks—being a Calvinist bluestocking is plainly responsible—are objectivity, impersonality, and a sense of the comic finiteness of human beings. Spark takes these to be virtues fostered by Catholicism.

Coming across passages like the one about Miss Brodie mistaking herself for the God of Calvin, one of my students saw that religion was at least as important as gender issues in this novel. She e-mailed me: "I have little idea about Christianity. What does it mean to belong to schools such as Presbyterian, Episcopal, Calvinism, Catholic? And what is the meaning to be a Catholic nun?"

A crucial question, inasmuch as Sandy, Miss Brodie's favorite disciple and destined to become a nun, plays Judas by betraying her teacher. The result of Sandy's betrayal is that Miss Brodie loses her job, which is tantamount to losing her reason for existing. She dies soon after, and Sandy, consumed by guilt, enters a convent.

If Sandy is the Judas among Miss Brodie's schoolgirl disciples, that would seem to imply that Miss Brodie is a Christ figure. It would be more accurate, however, to say that Miss Brodie is a parody-Christ. Spark's consistently satiric view of human affairs doesn't allow for the easy inflation of characters into Christ figures, a sentimental weakness of other novelists who were writing in the same years. From the divine point of view, outside human space and time, all human activities have the quality of parody. But Spark's comic detachment is not melodramatic: Miss Brodie is a parody-Christ but not the Antichrist. On balance, as Sandy only belatedly comes to understand, Miss Brodie's part in the sentimental education of her girls is positive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What, indeed, does it mean to belong to a "school" such as Catholic? I wondered what my students could make of Spark's deeply Catholic sensibility. As *Commonweal* readers perhaps know, the present near-moribund condition of Catholicism in Japan would have been a surprise to Catholics four centuries ago, when the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier brought Christianity to Japan. In the century that followed his arrival in 1549, as many as 300,000 Japanese may have converted to Christianity, and Jesuits became influential as advisers to powerful lords and even some of the country's rulers. Nagasaki is now famous in the West as the site of one of the devastating American atomic-bomb attacks, but it was famous in the seventeenth century as the Rome of the East.

Unfortunately for seventeenth-century Japanese Catholics, good times brought suspicion. Japan's feudal lords worried that Christianity would induce their vassals to transfer ultimate allegiance from them to God. So first, in 1614, Japan expelled all the priests and, twenty-five years later, all the remaining Europeans. For the next two centuries Japan remained a closed society. Even now, well over a century since Commodore Matthew Perry forced Japan to open to the West, Catholicism has not recovered anything like the prestige it enjoyed in its heyday. The corresponding lack of knowledge was clear not only in my students' reaction to Muriel Spark but also in their blank response to the Catholic material in Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood.*

McCarthy's memoir is notable for its attitude of disdain toward most forms of American Catholic life and American Catholics themselves. One of my students said that in Japan, where humility is a higher value than undiplomatic self-assertion, anyone as arrogant and self-willed as the young Mary would prove embarrassing to those close to her. I could only reply that there were probably fewer than six degrees of difference between that Japanese attitude and my own.

Still, there is some bravura writing in McCarthy's book. I wondered what my students would think about one chapter over which I myself have long puzzled. McCarthy's memoir was not written all at once. Originally the individual chapters appeared as self-contained sketches and stories in the *New Yorker.* Why, then, I have asked myself, did McCarthy elect to end this book about her Catholic girlhood with a long chapter, twice as many pages as any previous chapter, on her fascination with her maternal grandmother—who was a Jew.

Augusta ("Gussie") Morganstern Preston, the wife of Mary's maternal grandfather, seems at first an unlikely heroine. A recluse, she wore a veil in public to hide the scars from a disastrously unsuccessful facelift. But to the child Mary she was a deeply mysterious, romantic figure. What little we learn of Gussie's attitudes makes her sound as banal as any other adult character in Mary McCarthy's world. But the memoirist has special uses for her. McCarthy the adult memoirist is not explicit on this point, but as I read this chapter she conceives her grandmother as an old Christian stereotype of the Jew. Gussie is shown, even in her old age, as wholly carnal, occupied with paints, powders, and lotions to preserve her once-great beauty. Moreover, she is the only woman in the Mc-

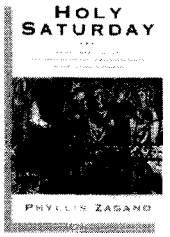
herder & herder

A "Must Read" for Every Catholic

Phyllis Zagano

HOLY SATURDAY

An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church



A clear and reasoned discussion that concludes it is entirely within the Church's power, authority, and tradition to restore its practice of ordaining women to the diaconate.

"Packed with fascinating facts and written in readable style, this argument in seven steps brings women's ordination to the diaconate into the clear light of day. [*Holy Saturday*] is graceful, cogent, fair to critics, and well grounded in theology, history, and church documents." —Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ

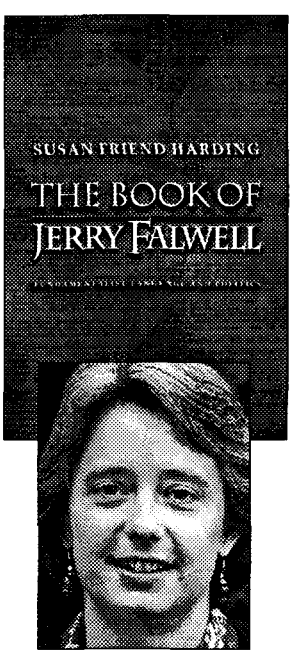
0-8245-1832-2 $16.95 192 pages/pb

THE CROSSROAD PUBLISHING COMPANY
Order Direct at 800-395-0690

The Book of Jerry Falwell

Fundamentalist Language and Politics

Susan Friend Harding



This is a fascinating, unique, and accessible work that takes fundamentalist Christianity on its own terms and deepens our understanding of religion and the modern world.

"Harding has brought the finely tuned eyes and ears of an anthropologist to her research inside Falwell's fundamentalist Baptist community. Her analysis is incisive and empathetic."
—Linda L. Giedl,
The Christian Science Monitor

Cloth $26.95 ISBN 0-691-05989-6

Princeton University Press

AT FINE BOOKSTORES OR CALL 800-777-4726 • WWW.PUP.PRINCETON.EDU

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Listening for Language

When I listen, the river is
the first sound I hear,
its faint brush of light
over stones a hidden syntax.

Then, some ghost of a wind
that slips under the door,
looks for syllables in spaces,
in the evening's soft bowl of silence:

a voice parched from floating
so far and unbodied in air.
It seeks to have a say and fall
silent. When I listen I still

like a rabbit sighted within
the thick summer growth.
Not fearing. No, not afraid....
Her eyes flashy, glassy and dark.

Even of breath, I lean into
the always approaching moment
that might tell all I was
stumbling wordless toward.

Steve Wilson

Carthy and Preston families to be associated with the erotic. Overall, she is mysterious, a woman with a secret.

We learn that secret only when Gussie's sister, Rose, dies and Gussie expresses her grief in terrible, almost inhuman howling. McCarthy makes the point that Gussie had not grieved so openly when here own husband had died or when her daughter Tess, Mary's mother, had perished while still a young woman, leaving behind four small children. The secret, it's clear, is that the Prestons have never been as real to Gussie as her own sister, blood of her own Jewish blood. In her quiet, reclusive way, Gussie had all those years been in exile among Seattle's genteel Christians.

If we ask how this may bear on Mary McCarthy's self-narrative of rebellion against her Catholic past, the answer, I think, is that little Mary is implicitly being depicted as identifying with her grandmother, the exotic outsider. Of course, the child can hardly have been fully aware of the basis of her grandmother's appeal for her. But the adult memoirist, perhaps recalling Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and his invocation of "silence, exile, and cunning," sees in the figure of the Jew a foreshadowing of her own literary role as the rebel who risks being marginalized as a pariah. Gussie, whose primary activity is looking after her body and making her daily tour of Seattle's upscale fashion stores, might seem too vacuous to use in making any large point. But, as I read this concluding chapter, McCarthy is suggesting, in the portrait of Gussie, how the little girl Mary will grow into a woman quite contrary, far more aggressively so than the self-isolated Jewish grandmother. Here, in the identification with the scarred outsider, are the beginnings of the adult McCarthy as a radical social critic. The grown-up McCarthy will become a scourge of bourgeois respectability, including its religious versions. She will devote a career to making up for the shame and abuse heaped on her during her Minneapolis years by her mother's Catholic relatives in the terrible aftermath of her parents' sudden death when she was six.

I might offer a similarly religiously oriented interpretation of Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer*. The title evokes that of the Church of England's ordering of the liturgy for Sunday worship. Yet Didion's novel does not seem, on the face of it, to have any religious content. Set in the years of the descent of the anti-Vietnam War movement into the mindless violence of the Radical Left, it is a story about a vacuous, well-to-do California matron who sees her empty life transformed by her daughter's involvement in terrorism and disappearance into the underground to avoid arrest. The mother becomes a drifter, finally offering her life in a revolutionary cataclysm that takes place in a banana republic wholly given over to violence and nihilism. And yet, I would argue, there are religious inklings, fragments, or seedlings of redemption, amidst this wasteland.

But I won't argue the point here. Rather, I mention my intuitions about the McCarthy and Didion texts because I would not have been led to them had I been teaching in a familiar American context. My Japanese students were very astute about the gender relationships. But I have alluded to their tone-deafness at certain levels. It was the religious dimension in these stories that they were missing. And I might have continued missing it, too, if I had not sensed a large gap in their response, a gap I needed to close up if I were to serve them as they deserved.

I continue to be interested in those moments when we or our students show ourselves to have tin ears. For Americans those moments often occur in the reading of literary texts containing explicit religious ideas and hard-to-detect religious residues. If, as with the Japanese students, you have little knowledge of the historical relationship between Christianity and Judaism, Christians and Jews, you lose much of the force of Mary McCarthy's characterization of Gussie Morganstern. If, in the case of Didion, you don't know that the liturgy unifies the disparate members of the Anglican congregation in communion by way of public prayer, hymns, ritual, and ceremony, you will miss the force of her novel's depiction of a total breakdown of order and community. How, then, did I spend my summer? Well, I think I learned a little about religious reading. As for learning about Japan's culture, I hope to go there some time soon to find out what difference it may make to teach familiar British and American texts on my students' home turf. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul Baumann

THE NOVELIST & THE DIRECTOR

In his way, Jordan was faithful to Greene

We've just completed Lent, for many of us a reminder of how feeble the will can be. In my case, broken promises also bring to mind director Neil Jordan's recent version of Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, a movie many found disturbingly weak-willed and unfaithful to its source.

The controversy over *The End of the Affair* concerns Jordan's decision to change the ending of the novel in a way that would seem to contradict the dramatic and religious logic of Greene's story. In the novel and film, Sarah Miles, an adulterous wife, makes a promise to God that if her dead lover, Maurice Bendrix, is brought back to life—he appears to have been killed during a German bombing raid—she will "give him up forever." In the book, Sarah goes to her grave having kept her promise to God, and her determination to give up sexual love and consolation for a spiritual relationship becomes the source of miraculous interventions after her death. However, in Jordan's film, Sarah breaks her vow and is reunited, if only for a few days, with her lover.

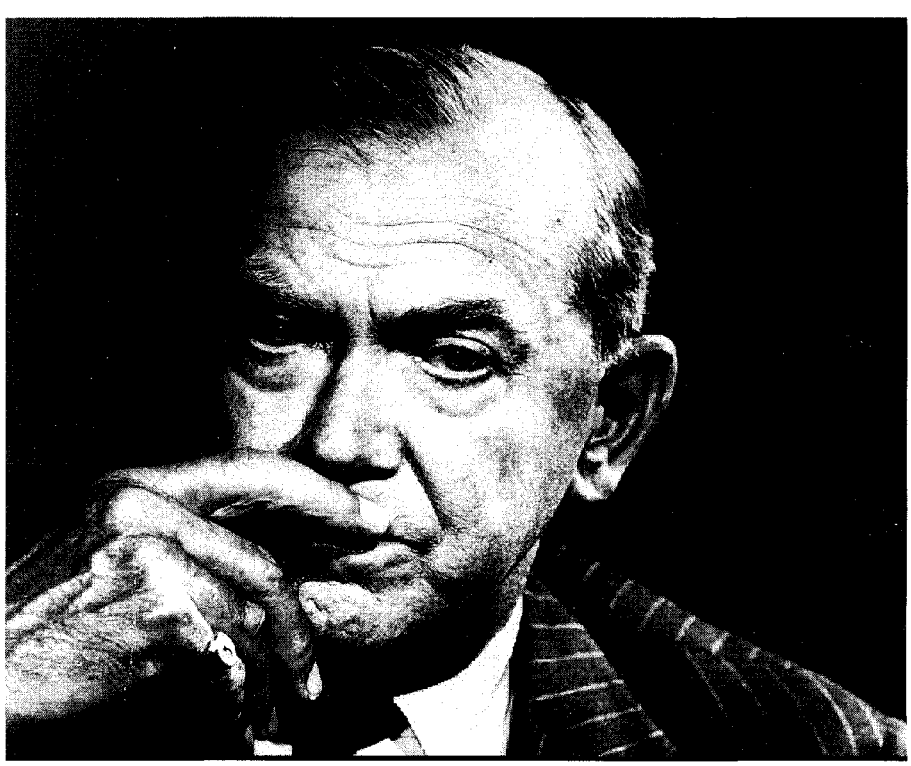
Critics charge that the hard edge of Greene's theological drama—his portrait of heroic sanctity and unblinking insistence on what God demands from us—is vitiated in the film. "The force of Sarah's character, her fate (and that of the two men in her life), and the central irony and piteousness of the story, all flow from Sarah's determination to keep her promise," wrote *Commonweal*'s Richard Alleva (January 28, 2000). Sarah's broken vow "finally dissolves Graham Greene's central premise and relieves Sarah of her theological dilemma. And without that dilemma, the story ultimately doesn't make sense." The *New Republic*'s Stanley Kauffmann (December 27, 1999) was even more severe, accusing Jordan of "ravaging the spiritual elements of the novel." "If Jordan felt obliged to squeeze and to distort—almost to apologize—for the religious theme, why bother with the book?" he concluded.

Alleva and Kauffmann are right; Jordan plays havoc with the carefully orchestrated plot and themes of Greene's novel. Still, I don't think Jordan is as willfully destructive of Greene's intentions as it may seem at first. Sarah's later broken vow is not, after all, out of character. Moreover, Jordan's decision directs our attention to some of the more enigmatic aspects of Greene's fevered and heterodox religious vision: that our lives take a path not of our own choosing and that along that path we are forever encountering God in the most unexpected guises—in the midst of adultery and other deceptions, for example. As Sarah confides to her diary in the novel: "Did I ever love Maurice as much as I love You? Or was it really You I loved all the time? Did I touch You when I touched him? Could I have touched You if I hadn't touched him first, touched him as I never touched Henry, anybody."

God's inscrutability and omniscience, the mystery of belief, and the transitory nature of human love are Greene's abiding concerns. *The End of the Affair* is not a story about Sarah's moral striving or the penalty exacted for violating the Sixth Commandment. For Greene, God's unfathomable grace is as promiscuous as his lovers, while God's mercy, as Sarah tells us, "sometimes looks like punishment."

The direction in which Jordan takes the story—away from attributing Sarah's miracles to her steadfastness in chastity—is rooted in the novel. Greene's Sarah all but falters many times. "I'm not at peace any more," she writes in her diary. "I just want him like I used to in the old days.... I want Maurice. I want ordinary corrupt human love."

Jordan seems to have imaginatively expanded on this and similar passages. Because so much of the novel takes place in Maurice's head and is revealed in Sarah's diary, neither of which is easy to translate to the screen, the director/screenwriter needed to rearrange and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

add to the dramatic furniture of the book. He devised a way to keep Sarah on stage: he brings the lovers together again and invents a deathbed scene. Instead of Bendrix reading from the diary, this scene allows Sarah to speak what are perhaps the crucial lines in the novel. "I've caught belief like a disease," she tells her lover. "I've fallen into belief like I fell into love. I've never loved before as I love you, and I've never believed in anything before as I believe now....I fought belief for longer than I fought love, but I haven't any fight left."

Jordan puts the pieces of his reconstructed ending together carefully. Just before going back to Bendrix, Sarah confesses that she is "too weak" to keep any of her promises—either to her husband or to God. In short, Bendrix compels her to return and Sarah merely accedes to his wishes. Jordan then emphasizes the futility of Sarah's moral resolutions by having her make yet another promise—to marry Bendrix. She can't keep that vow either—God won't let her. She's dying. The same sort of move is found in the novel. There, Sarah also decides to return to Bendrix. "I'm going to make him happy, that's my second vow, God, and stop me if you can, stop me if you can," she writes. But her decision is to no avail. God stops her, Greene would have us believe, by having her husband plead with her to stay.

The paradoxical strength of Sarah's weakness, manifest in her receptivity to God, is the most perplexing yet compelling aspect of her personality. "I can't do anything of myself," Greene has her confess as she makes her deal for Bendrix's life. "*Make* me believe." Her waywardness is inseparable from her profound sense that God has taken hold of her life, that God "knew what I would do before I did"—knew that she would commit adultery, renounce her adultery, and (at least in Jordan's version) sin yet again. This strong sense of predestination is a characteristic element in Greene's work and explains much of its antinomian flavor. "If he exists, then he put the thought of this vow into my mind and I hate him for it," Sarah says in the novel.

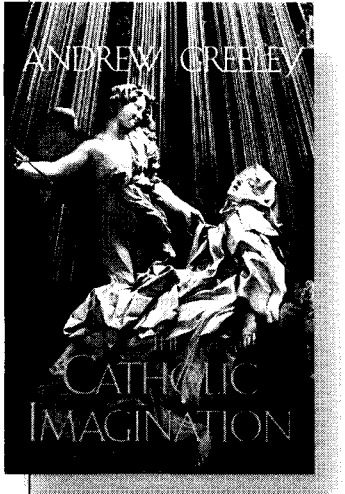
Given the pervasive sense of predestination in the novel, I would argue that Sarah's broken vow in Jordan's film is a plausible variation on Greene's design. "One gets so tired of people saying that my novels are about Good and Evil," Greene noted. "They are not about Good and Evil, but about human beings....I do not wish to judge any of my characters." In *The End of the Affair*, Greene is intent on showing how the fierce passions that bring us to faith are not strictly moral. Greene's God will work his will through our weakness or our strength, our faith or our disbelief, our love or even our hate. He is not a set of ideas, but a felt presence. This seeming amorality is the great paradox of Greene's "religious" novels. If God has made us in his own image, Bendrix speculates in the novel, he may be as "twisted as we humans are." Greene's "twisted" God is very much alive in Jordan's movie. He is as implacable in giving life as he is in taking it; as responsible for the exhilaration of sexual passion as he is for its diminution and loss. Jordan puts that God on screen.

Both Greene and Jordan tell us that God reveals his infinite "cunning" by using the passion of illicit sex to bring Sarah and perhaps even Bendrix to belief. This idea of God's cunning or doubleness also explains why the miracle Sarah is held responsible for at the end of the movie—the curing of a child's facial disfigurement—is so affecting. Earlier Sarah had asked, "What kind of a God would do such a thing to a child?" The answer, of course, is the same God who makes for any of us an "ordinary corrupt human love" that must end, who gives us life only to take it back. It is not the cheap stagecraft of removing the boy's disfigurement that startles. What startles is how, at the moment Bendrix's hatred for God reaches an apex at Sarah's cremation, Jordan focuses our attention on the everyday miracle of an ordinary child's face, seen as if for the first time. It is a face forever marked by the cruelly loving hand of its creator, and made all the more human by the transitory nature of its beauty. □

Paul Baumann *is* Commonweal*'s executive editor.*

Andrew Greeley

The Catholic Imagination



"A lively, controversial and stimulating book." —Robert Bellah, coauthor of *Habits of the Heart*

"This book is a tour de force." —Michael Hout,author of *Following in Father's Footsteps*

"A perceptive examination of the prominent role played by ritual, imagination, and spirituality in the everyday lives of both practicing and nonpracticing Catholics." —*Booklist*

$24.95 hardcover at bookstores or order 1-800-822-6657

www.ucpress.edu

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Michael O. Garvey

A REALLY NICE GUY

'Jesus' on CBS

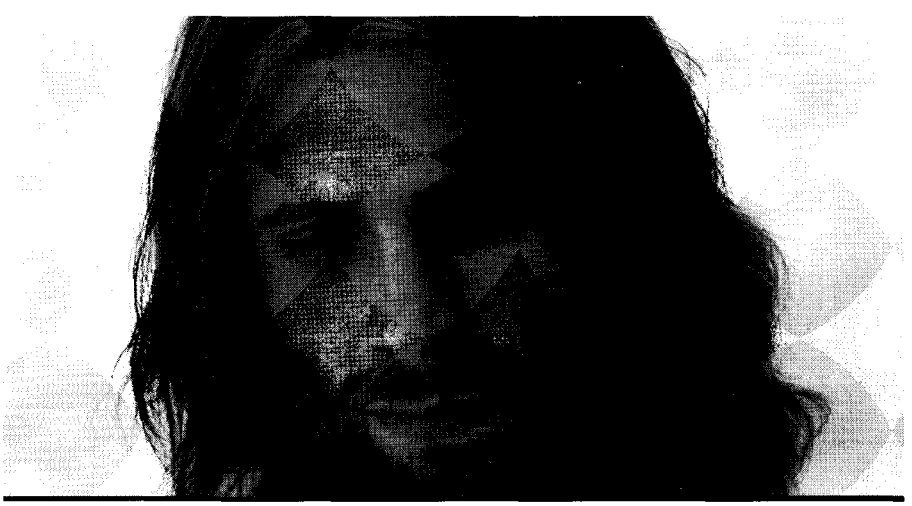
The casting director of "Jesus" (CBS, May 14 and 17) has assigned the starring role to Jeremy Sisto, a luxuriantly hirsute, good-looking surfer-type with a pleasant baritone, a ready smile, and excellent orthodontia. As a consequence, our Lord is once again presented as the only male inhabitant of Roman-occupied Judea with shoulder-length hair and a flower child's bonhomie.

This production is, according to the oxymoron of a CBS publicist, "an epic miniseries," a pretty accurate label for these four hours of bland television.

Jesus is introduced while in the throes of a nightmare, a dream—presumably more disorienting to him than to the audience—of savage Crusaders, ruthless inquisitors, and fatally wounded infantrymen all bellowing his name as they wreak and suffer the carnage of future millennia. He awakens beside Joseph—played by Armin Mueller-Stahl, who looks, sounds, and acts remarkably like the old Geppetto of Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* cartoon—in a roadside bivouac on their way to Bethany, where they have contracted with Lazarus for some carpentry work. There it quickly transpires that Jesus and Mary Magdalene have a crush on each other, which Martha and Lazarus not only approve but are encouraging toward matrimony.

This, obviously, cannot be, and shortly after Joseph dies, Jesus shows up again in Bethany tenderly, but firmly, informing Mary that his earthly father's death "has ended my life as I know it, and it's time now that I find my way." When Mary asks where his way is, Jesus tells her, "It can't be with you." In Saint John's account, this same Mary will later, over the understandable objections of a more practical disciple, pour costly fragrant oil over the feet of an appreciative Jesus, drying them with her hair. But the anointing at Bethany is omitted from this epic miniseries, as are nearly all of the Gospel's many numinous narrative speed bumps. Jesus curses no fig trees, terrifies no Gerasene peasants, announces no disturbing intention to divide previously peaceful households. Whatever else he may be, the messiah of CBS is decidedly not the Goodly Fere of Ezra Pound's poem, who could

> ...cow a thousand men
> On the hills o' Galilee.
> They whined as He walked out
> calm between,



CATHOLIC. SOCIALIST.
FATHER. LOVER.
HERO. ENEMY.
AMERICAN. HUMAN.

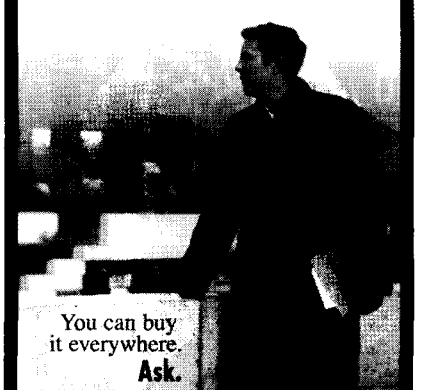
HARRINGTON.

THE OTHER AMERICAN

THE LIFE OF
MICHAEL HARRINGTON

A new book by
Maurice Isserman

He cut his teeth in the Socialist Party,
and was there for all the major movements—from labor to civil rights. His book *The Other America* woke a prosperity-lulled nation to the ravages of poverty and ushered in a new era of social reform. But his story has never been truly told—until now. In this bracingly honest biography, noted historian Maurice Isserman examines the man, his times, and his legacy.



You can buy it everywhere. **Ask.**

PUBLICAFFAIRS
A Member of the Perseus Books Group

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wi' his eyes like the grey o' the sea....

In the opinion of Pound's narrator, Simon Zelotes, "They'll no' get Him a' in a book I think, though they write it cunningly." They apparently won't get him in an epic miniseries, either.

Nor is Suzette Couture's script for "Jesus" so cunningly written. She has simply jettisoned any of the disconcerting things that the Gospel writers have said about or attributed to Jesus. He bears no warning that the day of judgment will close like a trap, nor does he wonder aloud how much longer he must put up with a faithless and perverse generation. He is not a consuming fire, but a very agreeable and idealistic young man—the son, after all, of Jacqueline Bisset—who laments the sway of anger and fear in the world. There is plenty of goodnatured horseplay with his disciples, a jubilant water splashing contest at a village well, a giggle or two while he skips rocks on the Sea of Galilee or plays whirligig with a delighted child. The only people in Judea able to resist this sensitive New Age Guy are such unadulterated bad guys as Herod, Caiaphas, and Pontius Pilate, who, despite being given a much more active and treacherous role than the evangelists assigned him, and despite a clever performance by Gary Oldman (among the baddest of all possible guys), manages to seem as drearily wicked as Jesus manages to seem drearily good.

The Lord of an epic miniseries must not be overly judgmental, so this one imposes no authoritative demands and speaks with endearing self-deprecation. Immediately before preaching a bowdlerized Sermon on the Mount ("Wealth does not buy life and a good heart..."), this Jesus glances about himself with a rueful shrug, asking his apostles, "Do you think I'll have something to say?" When he stumbles across the aftermath of a Zealot guerrilla raid, he confronts Barabbas to plead in vain for the life of a captured Roman soldier. Even as Jesus expresses his abhorrence of the slashing of Roman throats, his words yield no hint that such bloodshed affronts his Father's will, but merely echo old Peter, Paul, and Mary songs: "When does it stop?" The disgusted Barabbas should hardly be blamed for slugging him.

When the narrative is more carefully aligned with Scripture, it is mawkishly illustrated. The baptism of Jesus might have been lifted from the pages of *Marvel Comics* or *Treasure Chest*. The crucifixion takes place in front of a picturesque aqueduct that ruptures at the death of Jesus so that Sisto and Bisset's perfectly arranged pietà may be bathed in a lachrymose rain. After the Resurrection, Jesus fades out from the upper room into a celestial immensity of blue sky and sappy music. You can almost hear the director muttering "yadayadayada."

The recent conflagration in Kanungu, Uganda, and similar holocausts of Branch Davidians, Heaven's Gate disciples, Knights of the Solar Temple, adherents of Aum Shin Rikyo, and the followers of Jim Jones all reveal a glimpse of the teeth and claws of religious faith. To those who yearn for what the Gospels promise, they reveal as well a glimpse of what the Gospels cost. What CBS reveals in "Jesus" is a glimpse of something like Warner Sallman's famous painting *The Head of Christ*, a bland and thoroughly domesticated savior, neither promising nor costing much at all.

Some three hundred years after the events so feebly recounted in this television program, Julian the Apostate lay fatally wounded and brooding over the collapse of his efforts to revive Rome's imperial paganism. He is supposed to have despairingly exclaimed, "*Vicisti, Galilaee*!" (Something like, "You, win, Jesus!") The emperor's famous last words inspired a line which Algernon Charles Swinburne used to taunt the fatuous churchgoing bourgeoisie of his own time: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath." Whether or not Swinburne was just another narcissistic Victorian tilting against a preposterous, Anglicized caricature of the Lord, to view this epic miniseries is to understand the Swinburnes of this world much better, and even to sympathize with them a little. □

Michael O. Garvey *is the author of* Finding Fault.

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

Centennial Essays and Images

A thematic history of America's largest Catholic university.

During its Centennial year, DePaul became the largest Catholic university in the United States. Beginning in Chicago over 100 years ago as tiny St. Vincent's College, the identity of DePaul was forged in response to its urban setting. In eight thematic essays, this book interprets the social, intellectual, and economic challenges that stimulated a unique realization of St. Vincent DePaul's vision for higher education.

"[A] paradigmatic study of American Catholic urban higher education."
—*Dr. Roger Geiger*
College of Education, Penn State University

DePaul University Centennial Essays and Images
edited by John L. Rury and Charles S. Suchar
1998/192 pages/perfect/$29.95*
ISBN 0-7872-5100-3 **Price is subject to change.*

KENDALL / HUNT PUBLISHING COMPANY
4050 Westmark Drive P.O. Box 1840
Dubuque Iowa 52004-1840
dzl 49066010

ORDER TODAY! Call 1-800-228-0810

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A dark tale, told in singing prose

Wild Decembers
Edna O'Brien
Houghton Mifflin Company, $24, 259 pp.

Molly Winans

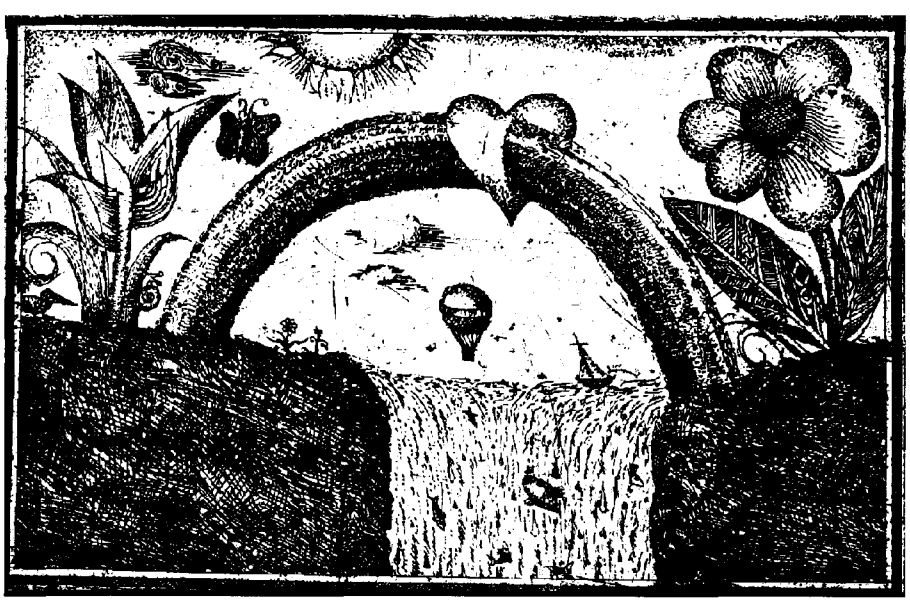
Born in 1936 on a farm in rural Ireland, Edna O'Brien married at sixteen and fled to London, where she has lived ever since. Like James Joyce, whose biography she has written for the Penguin Lives series, she speaks of writing as a calling that forced her to live in self-imposed exile—but Ireland remained the muse, as it did for Joyce. O'Brien returns in novel after novel to the source—the melancholic spirit, hard-bitten loyalties, and enduring hostilities. Her work has caused Joycean controversy back home, too, where her first novel, *The Country Girls* (1960), was banned, her parish priest gathering copies and staging a bonfire.

The *London Sunday Times* has called O'Brien "the most disturbingly intense and intimate of writers." Indefatigably lyrical, she is Joyce's direct literary descendant. "I believe," she has said, "that all prose should have the rhythm of poetry." And so it does stunningly in *Wild Decembers*. The novel is a dirge that keens and lulls by turns. The entrancing rhythms and refrains, the density and chant-like, drumming fragmentation work on the reader like music, right from the very first sentences: "Cloontha it is called—a locality within the bending of an arm. A few scattered houses, the old fort, lime-dank and jabbery and from the great whooshing belly of the lake between grassland and callow land a road, sluicing the little fortresses of ash and elder, a crooked road to the mouth of the mountain."

O'Brien combines this lyricism with a masterly storytelling instinct, so that *Wild Decembers* reads at once like an intricate poem and a taut, suspenseful page-turner. The novel inhabits familiar O'Brien territory, a grim rural Ireland where territory itself reigns supreme, "fields that mean more than fields, more than life and more than death too." The story revolves around a triangle. Joseph and Breege Brennan are brother and sister living on a mountain in Cloontha, an isolated village, on a farm left them by their parents. They live for their land and for each other, Breege in an introverted way and Joseph insistently. Into their midst comes Mick Bugler, who has been away in New Zealand and has come to Cloontha to farm inherited land adjacent to the Brennans', on what Joseph calls "my mountain." After a brief, doomed attempt at friendship, the two men, like their ancestors before them, feud over fields. Breege, despite fierce loyalty to her brother, falls in love with Bugler. Heartbreak and violence advance with grinding inevitability.

Indeed, the spool of the story unwinds as in *Oedipus*. No mortal actions can alter what fate has decreed, and no son can escape the sins of his father. Joseph himself loves the ancient Greeks—almost as helplessly as he loves his mountain, "the sacred fetters of land and blood." When Bugler, on his fancy tractor, stakes his claim on the mountain, Joseph can brook no trespass. For him, the past is every bit as vital and vivid as the present—the son of a past enemy must become a present enemy. Joseph is a man utterly possessed by history and its grievances, trapped, ready to mistrust at every turn.

Everyone in *Wild Decembers* is trapped: "The enemy is always there and these people know it." The villagers are a nasty lot, entertained by other people's pain, consumed by gossip, and eager to pounce on the vulnerable. Nothing lighthearted comes this way. But O'Brien is far from humorless. Dark comic relief takes form in an ecstatic dinner dance where villagers let loose, thanks to two siren sisters—witchy seducers who have



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their way with men—and in a discussion in the village hair salon that reads like Eudora Welty, only bawdy.

Still, O'Brien's eye is most often trained on turbulent sorrow, and her gaze is fearless. Each character is torn so many ways. Bugler wants his farm, wants Breege, must fight Joseph, must welcome his New Zealander fiancée. Breege can't abandon either Joseph or her love for Bugler, facing violence on one side and humiliation on the other. Joseph loves his sister but risks complete destruction of their life together to satiate his hatred, his "useless and aping belligerence." These characters wage battle after battle, and O'Brien never simplifies their tangled, Byzantine motivations; she concentrates instead on evocative physical and emotional details. At the novel's climax, when Joseph sets out to seek his revenge on Bugler, his fury driving him to commit a foul crime, he pauses to watch a mare and her new foal: "When he saw them so close together, his heart froze with a kind of agony at how outside everyone and everything he felt, an outcast in the world save for Breege, and he knew that by telling her that single shred of truth she would not desert him, and then in a headlong absence of reason he saw their lives return to normal, the pattern of the steady days as they had once been."

This ultimately murderous man just longs for the "pattern of the steady days," and, at that moment, more than anything, we wish it for him, too. Characters in *Wild Decembers* are petty, cruel, jealous, greedy, violent—and yet impossible to hate. O'Brien never mutes their meanness, but she knows it comes from hurt. When Breege's love for Bugler lands her in an asylum, she encounters harrowing human suffering and wonders, "Is it the serpent. Is it that we love too much. Or is it that we don't love at all." Questions come as statements, as if she knows they are unanswerable.

Breege and Bugler's love for each other is itself a question without an answer. Happiness rarely enters in, and then only tinged by dread—Bugler, already engaged to a beautiful woman, has no reason to court trouble with the immensely shy sister of a man who hates him—and still, the very existence of Breege and Bugler's love gives us hope. They are "flowers that are hatched in the snows," and O'Brien's prose takes on a completely different feel when the two are alone together. At one moment, they stand and look at a river. "It came as if from afar, wild and vigorous and whizzing, then the sight of it so thrilling up there in the emptiness, a deep amethyst-colored, plashing river, clean and icy cold." In *Wild Decembers*, the story of their love is this river—it comes from afar. The hope it introduces is thrilling and clean.

"Life is not a placid pool," Edna O'Brien has said. "It's a raging, storming sea, which we're all in." Like Yeats's Cuchulain, O'Brien battles with this sea—she has spent an impressive, prolific career fighting "with the invulnerable tide," and she shows no signs of growing weary from the effort. □

Molly Winans *is director of publications at the Kingswood-Oxford School in West Hartford, Connecticut.*

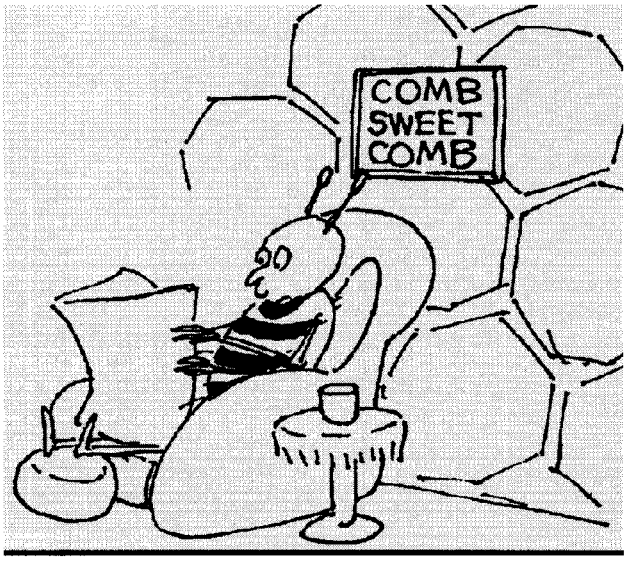
GREELEY'S WORLD

The Catholic Imagination
Andrew M. Greeley
University of California Press, $24.95, 198 pp.

James T. Fisher

Andrew Greeley has been writing on the "Catholic imagination" since the 1970s, but this motif was also implicit in his earlier works on the value of Catholic schools, the centrality of parish life, and the persistence of ethnicity as a source of personal and communal identity. His sociological work, his novels, and his essays all feature a conviction that Catholic "difference" is rooted in a kind of "sacramentality of everyday life." As Greeley suggests in his latest book, *The Catholic Imagination*, "there is a propensity among Catholics to take the objects and events and persons of ordinary life as hints of what God is like, in which God somehow lurks, even if (as is perhaps often the case) they are not completely self-conscious about these perceptions of enchantment."

For a rather slender "extended essay," *The Catholic Imagination* provides a good introduction to Greeley's unique *modus operandi*, blending stories, survey data, and a few memorable assertions guaranteed to provoke double and triple takes among those unfamiliar with the style of this priest, sociologist, and popular novelist. Working from two "representative samples" of married Americans, for example, Greeley is prepared to demonstrate not only that Catholics "enjoy" sex more than others; they sport "higher rates of sexual love because of the impact on them of the story of human passion as a hint of divine passion." In general, how-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ever, *The Catholic Imagination* is gentler in tone, the claims less extravagant than in some of Greeley's earlier works on related topics, notably *The Catholic Myth* (1990), an eminently "teachable" work that has sparked wonderful debates (and enraged some Protestant students) on campuses across the country.

Greeley is less concerned here with contrasting the sacramental (or "analogical") imagination of Catholics with the "dialectical" world-view he and others have ascribed to Protestants, who purportedly imagine a distant God-as-sovereign and stress the "unlikeness" of human love and divine love. He proposes instead to relate the Catholic "sensibility" inhering in selected works of high culture (painting, films, cathedrals) with the behavior of "ordinary" Catholics as tested against empirical data. He begins with a graceful story of the Köln (Cologne) cathedral, situating this "gray Gothic pile" (building began in 1248) at the center of the city's "dense" religious history. For Greeley, the great cathedrals are "treasure houses of stories located inside of storied cities." The most representative Catholic churches are not "quiet, prayerful places" but have "always been crowded with people, tombs, chapels, altarpieces, paintings, tapestry, votive candles, and stained glass," all crucial elements of a narrative perpetually renewed in the attentive presence of the faithful.

At the Hispano-Moorish mission church of San Xavier del Bac near Tucson, Greeley discerns "the same stories of a God who is deeply involved with his creation." The interior of this "White Dove of the Desert" features 150 carefully arranged images of Jesus and Mary, angels and saints, the latter depicted as "real people—full-bodied and full-blooded." San Xavier del Bac is not far from the campus of the University of Arizona, where Greeley spends part of each year teaching sociology. His knowledge of Köln is presumably the result of his affiliation with a social science research center located in that city. But wherever Greeley travels, Chicago remains the ground of his own analogical imagination. Köln "is not exactly Chicago as seen from the Shedd Aquarium (what is?)," he writes, "but it is still striking." Like James Joyce's Dublin, site of stories both "fantastic and structured," Greeley's Chicago—with its densely Catholic network of parish neighborhoods—is the kind of "real" place without which "there can be no meaning" for those possessed of "a certain kind of Catholic sensibility."

Greeley's forays into Catholic visual art are unsupported by this same solid foundation that serves him so well in other contexts. He suggests that such erotically charged works as Gianni Dagli Orti's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* and Carlo Cignani's *Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar* show that "human arousal is a hint of divine arousal." While not claiming an explicit link between "high art" and "popular" Catholic practice, Greeley does maintain that both traditions reject the negative "Augustinian" perspective on human sexuality that figures so prominently in church teachings. The "popular tradition" has been "reinforced by the enchanted imagination of Catholicism, which senses intuitively that the body of the beloved is grace." Taken separately, these are plausible arguments though Greeley's attempt to connect them with empirical data feels a bit like being rushed into a sociology course before the lecture on art history is completed. Readers may look elsewhere in his massive corpus for more detailed statistical analyses of Catholic attitudes on a wide range of topics.

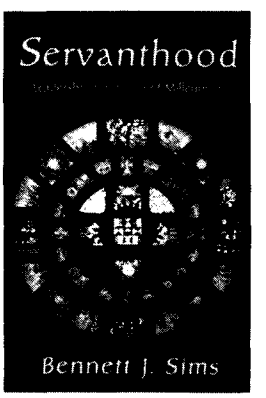
Greeley moves safely back to the "old neighborhood" for a look at films and fiction (especially that of James T. Farrell) that treat issues of "community" from a Catholic perspective. His brief treatment of Italian American filmmakers Nancy Savoca (*Household Saints*) and Martin Scorsese (*Mean Streets*) is fascinating and showcases his novelist's feel for narrative structure. He overlooks, however, the deep indebtedness of these artists to esthetic and spiritual traditions outside of their own. Filmmaking is no more collaborative an art form than cathedral building, but the architects of the Köln cathedral, unlike Martin Scorsese, probably did not commune with artists of radically divergent sensibilities.

Servanthood

Leadership for the Third Millennium

Bennett J. Sims

1-56101-145-2 • 183 pp • paper



"A marvelous book! Grounded in gospel values, written in clear and profoundly challenging words, *Servanthood* uncovers the meaning of Servant Leadership for the Church and the world."—*Sister Nancy E. Westmeyer, OSF, co-director of* Vision Time, *an organization committed to Servant Leadership*

"My brother, Bennett, has given us a gem of a book. We all know patriarchy does not work any longer. *Servanthood* gives us a new paradigm, Servant Leadership. In simple, but profound language it breaks open for us the paradox and shows the way to a new style of leadership we have been searching for."
—*Albert H. Ottenweller, Retired Bishop of Steubenville*

Cowley Publications

28 Temple Pl. • Boston, Massachusetts 02111

1-800-225-1534 • Fax: 617-423-2354

cowley@cowley.org • www.cowley.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two of Scorsese's greatest films, for example, were products of the director's partnership with writer Paul Schrader, who wrote the screenplay for *Taxi Driver* and devised the original treatment for *Raging Bull*. The tension between Schrader's Calvinist world-view (the product of a fundamentalist Protestant family, he viewed his first film at the age of seventeen) and Scorsese's Catholic visual esthetic was, by the director's own admission, the source of *Taxi Driver*'s creative power. The broader issue here concerns Protestantism's highly collaborative and dynamic relationship with American Catholic culture, a theme Greeley ignores in staking boundaries around the "unchanged and probably unchanging Catholic imagination."

Greeley has been criticized for downplaying generational differences among American Catholics (*see* sociologist James Davidson's letter in *Commonweal*, January 28). Yet even if we were to grant that the "Catholic imagination" remains constant across generations, no one can deny that American Catholics' knowledge and awareness of other traditions has altered dramatically over time. My parents, who were born in the same year as Greeley, did not really know any Protestants until they entered the work force. My Catholic students, with rare exceptions, display an unselfconscious familiarity with the idioms of both evangelical piety and the gospel of personal fulfillment. At the same time, many conservative evangelicals are currently generating a "liturgical turn" within their own tradition, reshaping a legacy of hostility toward Catholic ritual. The central role of converts in shaping American Catholicism must also be considered in any discussion of the "Catholic imagination." Although Greeley acknowledges that some people are "attracted to Catholicism as adults by virtue of its enchanting aspects," converts do not simply trade one whole identity for another but bring significant elements of their prior identity to the new community of faith.

In a preemptive rebuttal at the conclusion of his book, Greeley asserts that critics "miss the point entirely" if they suggest, among other things, that there is more than one version of the Catholic imagination. He has "attempted little more than to raise the question" of a possible link between artistic and popular sensibilities. He has done considerably more than that, here as in the past. Greeley has made the seminal insights of theologian David Tracy on the "analogical imagination" accessible to a wide audience and has validated by his considerable prestige inquiries into the sources of Catholic cultural identity. Without the "questions" he has raised in the past, the field of American Catholic studies would be much the poorer, if it existed at all. Though his habit of isolating the Catholic imagination runs counter to the comparativist impulse of much recent scholarship, given his track record I would not bet against him with your money, much less my own.

The irony is that Greeley's highly contentious standing in a fragmented church works much more "dialectically" than "analogically." His persona as a controversial yet popular celebrity author at war with Catholic "elites" evokes the British scholar Paul Giles's characterization of those quintessentially Protestant artists Emerson and Whitman, "privileged seers prophetically empowered to perceive invisible resemblances" (*American Catholic Arts and Fictions*, 1992). Greeley draws on the cultural products of the universal church for inspiration, but his own fabled career could only happen in America: to invent him anew one would need to blend the gifts of a James T. Farrell with those of a Herman Melville. □

James T. Fisher *teaches in the religious studies department at Saint Louis University. His most recent book is* Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley: 1927–61 *(University of Massachusetts).*

AUGUSTINE, IT AIN'T

City of God
E.L. Doctorow
Random House, $25, 272 pp.

Paul Elie

One evening not long ago, walking home from work, I stopped at a secondhand bookshop in Greenwich Village. My old copy of *The Long Loneliness* had split down the spine, and I wanted another just like it. The shop was not thronged; by now I know where the religious stuff is kept, on some narrow shelves in the back between the literary criticism and the psychology. The Dorothy Day book wasn't there. But there were some religion books I hadn't seen before, in half a dozen plastic milk crates on the floor: a hundred books in all, the dust jackets neatly covered in plastic. Here was Karl Barth in English and in German. Ronald Knox's *Enthusiasm*. Paul Tillich's *Theology of Peace. The Pope from the Ghetto. The Underground Church. Christian Yoga.*

Clearly somebody had sold off a whole library, had brought in books that had been bought with care over the years. As I sorted through them, half kneeling, half squatting, I wondered who had sold them and why, but my mind had already supplied a scenario. A priest had lost his faith. I pictured him puttering in an empty church at midweek when it came—the knowledge that Christianity could no longer hold him—perhaps all at once like a hailstorm, perhaps subtly like dust settling on the doorsill. So out with the cardigans went the theological library. The priest, after the appropriate season of doubt, moved on.

That priest could have been the protagonist of *City of God*. The novel centers on Thomas "Pem" Pemberton, whose life and calling, already in doubt, are altered once and for all when the brass altar cross is stolen from the church in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

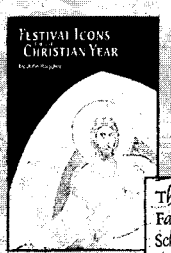
the East Village ("Saint Timothy's, Episcopal, typical New York Brownstone Ecclesiastic") where he is rector, along with candlesticks and items from the sacristy. A few days after the theft, Pem spies an African street vendor wearing the purple Lenten vestments; the candlesticks turn up at a secondhand shop. And, after a few prank calls, a rabbi phones to inform him that the cross has been found on the roof of his brownstone synagogue on the Upper West Side, where the rabbi, Joshua Gruen, and his lovely wife Sarah Blumenthal, a rabbi herself and the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, are attempting to "redesign" Jewish tradition through a movement they call Evolutionary Judaism. Priest and rabbis alike wonder who left the cross atop the synagogue and what they meant by it. Pem, who as a rector has a forgiving schedule and a flock of five, dubs himself a "Divinity Detective" and decides to find out. For giving a bold homily about the response of Christians to the Holocaust, he is "permanently unassigned" and his church deconsecrated; after Rabbi Joshua dies while in Europe in search of his wife's father's wartime diary, Pem joins Rabbi Sarah in life and love.

In the end, Pem, predictably and pointedly, becomes a Jew. It seems Doctorow started with the outcome—Christian priest converts to Judaism at end of millennium—and regressed from there. "If not in all stories, certainly in all mystery stories, the writer works backward," the narrator, a novelist himself, intones. "The ending is known and the story is designed to arrive at the ending. If you know the people of the world speak many languages, that is the ending: The story of the Tower of Babel gets you there. The known ending of life is death: The story of Adam and Eve arrives at that ending. Why do we suffer, why must we die? Well, you see, there was this Garden...."

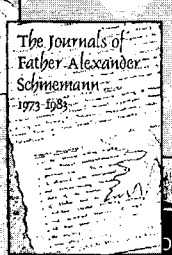
It may be that the scriptural authors knew where they were going. Probably it is more complex. In any case, the novelist usually works differently. The ending of a novel emerges like a blessing, at once planned for and discovered. But Doctorow—acclaimed, popular, wealthy, a professor at NYU on the side, old enough for eminence and young enough for further triumphs, with his novels having been staged on Broadway and made into movies and published in thirty languages—seems to have been loath to write a mere novel. What he had in mind (the jacket copy suggests) was a mulligan stew of fiction, prophecy, journalese, cosmological musing, and the like—a "defining document" of our times that depicts nothing less than "a quest for an authentic spirituality at the end of the twentieth century."

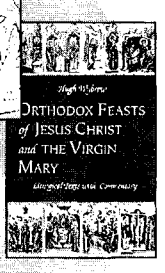
The novel, it emerges (but none too clearly), is a conceit gradually taking shape in the workbook of a New York novelist, and the story I have summarized is swaddled in large tracts of extraneous material, carelessly written and arranged. There are attempts to render Einstein's diary, and Wittgenstein's too. There are banal cultural-critical riffs about the power of the movies. There is Sarah's father's journal, a compendium of every Holocaust cliché in the book. An ex-*Times* guy's quest to get to

St Vladimir's Seminary Press



Spring releases

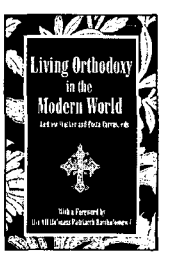




575 Scarsdale Road
Crestwood, NY 10707
1-800-204-2665 (9-5, M-F)
Fax: 914-961-5456
email: svspress@svots.edu

John Baggley
Festival Icons of the Christian Year
18 full-color icon plates.
ISBN 0-88141-201-5
192 pp. $18.95

Carras and Walker, eds.
Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World
Contributors: Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom), Bishop Kallistos (Ware), Professor H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., Andrew Louth, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), Gillian Crow, Bishop Basil of Sergievo, Metropolitan Athanasios of Hercegovina, Sister Magdalen, Costa Carras, Andrew Walker, Dr. Jamie Moran.
ISBN 0-88141-212-0 246 pp. $16.95



The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann, 1973-1983
These selections from Fr. Schmemann's journals reveal his recollections and experiencse during the last ten years of his life.
Available June 2000.
ISBN 0-88141-200-7 432 pp. $19.95

Hugh Wybrew
Orthodox Feasts of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary
Liturgical Texts and Commentary
Selected liturgical texts with commentary. An opening section gives a concise account of the development of the liturgical calendar and the origins of these feasts in the Orthodox Church.
ISBN 0-88141-203-1 144 pp. $10.95

Kallistos Ware
The Inner Kingdom
224 pp.
Paper ISBN 0-88141-209-0 $14.95
Hardback ISBN 0-88141-210-4 $22.95
The first of a planned six-volume compilation of the collected works of Bishop Kallistos Ware of Diokleia. Available June 2000.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the bottom of the story of an SS officer hiding in Cincinnati. A monologue "as if" by Frank Sinatra. A brief life of the narrator given in long lines of unstressed verse, as in the Jerusalem Bible. An embarrassing series of episodes under the rubric of the "Midrash Jazz Quartet," in which the narrator, again in verse, offers religio-existential glosses on Tin Pan Alley standards.

It may be that Doctorow's ambitions were genuine. To judge from the aphorisms with which he studs the text, like cellophane-tipped toothpicks in a catered spread, *City of God* is meant to be a Big Book. It is a coda to the twentieth century, and so partial, tentative, inclusive. It is a mimetic riff on the century's defining account of creation—the Big Bang, "a great expansive flowering...an infinite series of universes expanding into one another, all at the same time." It is a philosophical crazy quilt made from the sheets of our "wrecked romance with God." It is a found object with the radiant energy of the writer's consciousness and the manic street vibe of New York, an "island cathedral, a religioplex," a diaspora of diasporas, a city of God.

Alas, *City of God* is none of these things. It is just a bad book. Doctorow makes his big ideas small by offering them as is. Out of a yearning to experiment, a desire to imitate Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, or a will to get the book into print before the last century was long gone, he let go of craft, taste, and discipline. If you see *City of God* for sale on a sidewalk or in a used bookshop, pass it by; more than a workbook, it is what jazz musicians call a "fake book"—a rough, hand-written guide to the standards, sketchy and artless, with no use other than to remind them how a song goes, in case they have forgotten. □

Paul Elie, *editor of* A Tremor of Bliss: Contemporary Writers on the Saints, *is a frequent contributor.*

stop in and visit us on the web:

commonwealmagazine.org

NOT JUST FOR ELITES

The Paradox of American Democracy
Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of Public Trust
John Judis
Pantheon Books, $26, 305 pp.

Democracy Derailed
Initiative Campaigns and the Power of Money
David Broder
Harcourt, $23, 260 pp.

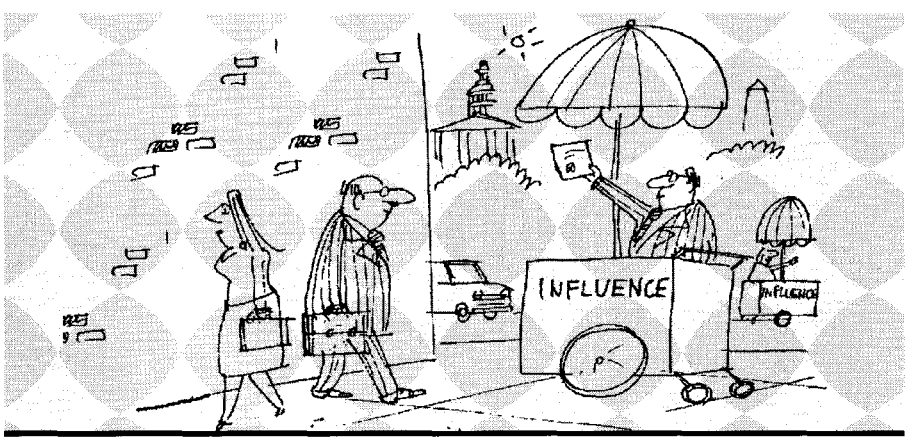
Kevin Mattson

To say that American democracy is in crisis is like saying the earth is round. Voting rates plummet, polls report heightened levels of cynicism, and young people, especially, show little interest in political matters. To this sad scenario, add the analyses of two leading journalists, John Judis and David Broder. Read together, their books tell us a great deal about what has gone wrong.

Judis's book starts slowly. He tries to provide his readers with a sweeping perspective on American political history during the twentieth century, but his historical acumen pales in comparison to his journalistic skills. Covering the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the 1960s, Judis provides few insights; his reading is spotty, drawing from dated interpretations and tending toward generalizations. This weakness highlights a larger problem in American intellectual life: increasingly, journalists fill in a void left by academic historians, who write specialized books for other academics. In this case, readers can simply skip over the first sections of Judis's book for the real rewards at the end.

In explaining the current backlash against liberalism, Judis covers new ground and draws years of political journalism into focus. Businesses, upset by new regulatory regimes created by environmentalists and public-interest lobbyists like Ralph Nader, turned profoundly reactionary during the 1970s. During the 1970s and 1980s, corporations funded a slew of right-wing think tanks where hired intellectuals could curse regulation while drooling over the promise of free markets. At K Street lobbying firms, high-powered lawyers gutted America's relatively weak welfare and regulatory policies. The endgame of these developments was Newt Gingrich's rise and fall from power. Gingrich handed pens to corporate CEOs who wrote their antiregulatory wish lists into the "Contract for America." Judis argues persuasively that this history illustrates how America's elites have placed short-term gain before civic responsibility.

He buttresses this story by discussing the decline of labor unions and the burnout of 1960s activists. These details sug-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

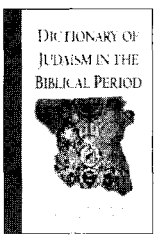
gest how bad the situation is, as does Judis's close analysis of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), a small group within the Democratic party that backed Clinton. Though the DLC created important civic-minded policies (for instance, national public service) during Clinton's second term, its "program on trade and Social Security...mimicked Republican conservatism," becoming more "congenial to its corporate funders." Essentially, public-interest liberals went belly-up. What makes this interpretation so important is that Judis does not bemoan the rise of "special interests"—an elastic term used with little discrimination by today's pundits. Instead, he holds corporate power and "lobbyists and irresponsible elites backed by conservative Republicans" directly responsible for the anemic state of our politics. Nor is he embarrassed to express faith in a "public interest."

While Judis focuses "inside the Beltway," *Washington Post* political columnist David Broder looks outside, but he too presents disturbing findings. Studying the initiative and referendum—means by which citizens can directly enact legislation by popular vote—Broder uncovers the enormous influence money plays in this process. After his own simplistic history of the Progressive Era, Broder goes on to analyze California and Oregon, where the initiative and referendum are central to the political process. He begins with Proposition 13, a famous piece of citizen-legislation that capped taxes in California. Broder explains, "Prop. 13 and its progeny have spawned a huge industry devoted to the manipulation of public opinion. Campaign consultants, pollsters, media advisers, direct-mail specialists, and others have made themselves, in effect, the new bosses of American politics." The remainder of the story focuses on the gory details of "*faux* populism" or "Astroturf" politics—that is, big money masquerading as the public interest. The expense of gathering signatures and designing advertisements—the heart of initiative campaigns—requires enormous amounts of money. The wishes of millionaires and irresponsible elites drive many initiatives.

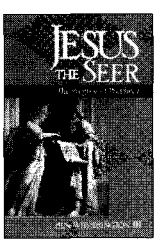
Though much of Broder's analysis is hard to dispute, his core assumptions demand scrutiny. After all, he could have written the same book about how money corrupts Congress and state legislatures. The reason he doesn't is that, deep down, Broder is an old-fashioned Federalist and believer in a representative constitutional republic. He follows the reasoning of James Madison: citizens cannot always be trusted to govern themselves. Hence, for Broder, the initiative and referendum should be scrapped.

In light of his evidence, this argument makes some sense. Yet it ignores the philosophy behind direct democracy. In John Dewey's classic work, *The Public and Its Problems*, he argued persuasively that "popular government is educative as other modes of political regulation are not." The potential that the initiative and referendum have to enhance deliberation among citizens—to educate them into the virtues of public judgment—should not be overlooked. Though Broder interviews bamboozled citizens ignorant about the initiatives they are asked to vote on, I have talked to Oregonians who

HENDRICKSON PUBLISHERS

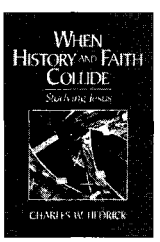


DICTIONARY OF JUDAISM IN THE BIBLICAL PERIOD
JACOB NEUSNER, EDITOR IN CHIEF; WILLIAM SCOTT GREEN, EDITOR
This invaluable reference defines concepts, religious practices, theological terms, persons, places, and essential vocabulary from the writings of Judaism, ranging from the time of the Pentateuch's final formation until the close of the Babylonian Talmud. Over 3,300 entries by seventy international scholars offer historical, literary, religious, and archaeological background for understanding the canonical form of the Bible, the texts of the Second Temple period, and the classical writings of rabbinic Judaism. It has few rivals when it comes to accuracy and readability, and it will be an indispensable resource for anyone studying religion.
$59.95 • ISBN 1-56563-458-6 • HARDCOVER • JUDAICA • REFERENCE



JESUS THE SEER
The Progress of Prophecy
BEN WITHERINGTON III
Increasingly scholars are realizing that prophetic traditions, expressions, and experiences stand at the heart of most religions in the ancient Mediterranean world. This is no less true for the world of Judaism and Jesus. Witherington looks at the broader expression of prophecy in its ancient Mediterranean context in an attempt to better understand biblical prophecy in that wider context, as well as the prophetic role of Jesus.
$29.95 • ISBN 1-56563-344-X • CLOTH • BIBLICAL STUDIES • PROPHECY

THE APOSTLE OF GOD
Paul and the Promise of Abraham
JOHN L. WHITE
"In this unique study White proposes that Paul believed in a creator god who started spiritual creation with Abraham and continued with the resurrected Christ. To demonstrate his thesis White includes extensive discussion of the Greco-Roman ruler cult and its impact on the readers of Paul's letters, as well as Paul himself. White's assertion . . . will undoubtedly stimulate considerable discussion."
—Graydon F. Snyder, Professor of NT, Emeritus, Chicago Theological Seminary
$24.95 • ISBN 1-56563-283-4 • CLOTH • NEW TESTAMENT • THEOLOGY



WHEN HISTORY AND FAITH COLLIDE
Studying Jesus
CHARLES W. HEDRICK
Hedrick explores the tension, or collision, that occurs when studying the Jesus of faith with the critical eye of historical scholarship. He outlines the nature of historical inquiry, gives a brief history of how scholars have understood Jesus, and identifies the essential issues confronting the reader of the New Testament Gospel accounts of Jesus: discrepancies, contradictions, and differences as well as strong similarities among different writers.
$16.95 • ISBN 1-56563-235-4 • PAPER • BIBLICAL STUDIES

Available at your bookstore or call toll-free: 800-358-3111
Outside the U.S.: 978-532-6546 • E-mail: orders@hendrickson.com • Fax: 978-531-8146

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cherish the power and concomitant responsibility delegated to them. As Oregon's governor put it to Broder: "The process is a blessing, but the way it's being used is a curse." This attitude—not Broder's wholesale rejection—seems appropriate in the face of big money's abuse of direct democracy. And after all, if big money is so powerful, why believe that representative institutions can withstand it any better? On this count, Judis's book corrects Broder's misplaced faith.

So what about Judis's conclusions? He calls for legislation that would cut back on corporate power and strengthen citizen input in government. But he also suggests (or at least his story suggests) that elites must rediscover their civic obligations. Here the argument falters. After all, Judis asserts that up to the present, elites embraced civic consciousness in return for public trust. But what about America's populist spirit? Even during the placid 1950s, when, Judis argues, "Americans accepted the political status quo," Joe McCarthy stoked the passions of many working-class Americans resentful of wayward elites (George Wallace later followed suit). More important, why have elites suddenly dropped their civic consciousness to follow the money? Judis never explains. One answer is that they have discovered their self-interest, no longer clothed in all that old-time civic lore. So why wait for their civic reawakening?

Maybe all we have in the end is the old Progressive Era belief stated so well by John Dewey: "The cure for the ailments of democracy is more democracy." Instead of hoping for a return to a constitutional republic run by civic-minded elites, why not try to reengage citizens in politics? One way to do this is to improve the means of deliberation and political education (through more public forums, interactive town meetings, or voter-education drives). It seems to me that democracy's challenge is to nurture civic virtues among all citizens—not just elites. □

Kevin Mattson *is associate director of the Walt Whitman Center (Rutgers University) and author of* Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era *(Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).*

FAR AWAY & LONG AGO

The Book of Miracles
The Meaning of the Miracle Stories in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam
Kenneth L. Woodward
Simon and Schuster, $27, 419 pp.

Luke Timothy Johnson

Talk about miracles often degenerates into debates over whether they happen. Kenneth Woodward invites the reader to a richer and more rewarding consideration of what miracle stories mean to the traditions that recount them. A senior writer at *Newsweek* and that magazine's religion editor for thirty-six years, Woodward has had the occasion to read more than a few books and cultivate some scholarly contacts. He has combined these resources in a volume that functions quite well as an anthology of miracle stories from five religious traditions, but that also serves as a distinctive (and often undervalued) point of entry into the study of religion itself. The advantage of having a journalist—especially one as well-read and as well-directed on technical points as Woodward is—writing this sort of book is that it entertains as well as instructs, with very few descents into the solemnly didactic. Woodward keeps the prose clean and allows his judicious endnotes and extensive bibliography to offer quiet support for his unpretentious and efficient management of a complex collection of stories and religious traditions.

In his introduction ("Making Room for Miracles"), Woodward acknowledges the very different worlds inhabited by the recorders of his miracle stories and those who, like Thomas Jefferson, wish for a religion purged of all supernatural (that is, superstitious) elements. Woodward argues that the miraculous is at the heart of the world's religions and that such stories deserve attention today for two reasons in particular. First, since the global village is now in our neighborhood playground, it might be a good idea to know each other's stories. Second, against the tendency to think that all religions are basically saying the same thing, close study of miracles within their respective contexts—even miracles that strongly resemble each other—shows just how distinctive those traditions are. A third reason is not spelled out at the beginning but becomes more explicit at the end of the book. There is a long distance between the sense of enchantment found in these stories and the crude credulity/wish-fulfillment reflected in surveys, which report major portions of the population believe more firmly in UFOs and personal angels than in God, and are more passionate about spirituality than about religion.

Woodward's principles of selection and exposition are simple. He includes stories that are both interesting and classic. He interprets them from within the respective traditions. He recounts only stories involving figures who are (at some point in time) human—even if as avatars. Finally, he wants to include stories that in principle were witnessed by others, thus excluding the Resurrection of Jesus but including (perhaps inconsistently, but we are glad) the Buddha's experience of enlightenment.

Part 1 deals with monotheistic religions. After an introduction to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that surveys their respective founders and sacred texts, Woodward walks the reader through the miracle stories of the Hebrew Bible, noting how they tend to decrease as the story progresses. He then tells miracle stories associated with Jewish sages, saints, and spiritual masters. The section on Christianity traces the miracle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stories of the Gospels (especially Mark), the Acts of the Apostles, and Christian saints from antiquity to Francis of Assisi. The same pattern obtains for Islam, as Woodward includes miracles associated with Muhammad and then a number of Sufi saints. Part 2 provides an introduction to the religions of India, followed by sections dealing with the miracles of the Lord Krishna and Hindu saints, and then the miracles of the Buddha and the Buddhist saints. Readers working their way through the miracles and their explications will be impressed by certain patterns that Woodward has built into his structure: the way founders attract miracle stories, especially around their births; the way miracles serve as demonstrations of divine power for purposes of publicity and polemic; the way the miraculous and the mystical are frequently found together. Most of all, readers will notice that virtually all these stories are about long ago and far away.

In part 3, Woodward turns briefly to the survival of the miraculous in contemporary manifestations of these classic religious traditions: the medicalization of the miraculous in the modern Roman Catholic process of canonization; the democratization of the miraculous in Pentecostal healings through ministers like Oral Roberts; the miracle as blessing through the Hasidic rebbe; and finally, miracles and God consciousness in a contemporary Hindu saint (Mata Amritanandamayi). An even briefer epilogue suggests that in contemporary Western rootlessness, the desire for the miraculous has much less to do with a reverence for the power of the divine outside of us and much more to do with "the theater of the questing inner self."

Woodward leaves undeveloped some intriguing themes that his examples and his commentary suggest. It would be instructive to pursue through his examples the multiple ways in which the human body serves as the arena and the symbol of the divine presence and activity through these diverse traditions. And each tradition also shows a persistence between the popular embrace of the miraculous and the suspicion of signs and wonders from the intellectual elite. These and other fascinating aspects of religion lay embedded in these odd yet compelling stories, and make the book a genuine resource not only for general reading but also for courses in religious studies. Most difficult of all are the questions with which Woodward leaves the reader: What are we to make of the contemporary willingness to believe in miracles despite all the arguments made against them by Enlightenment critics? And what are we to make of the fact that such belief is detached from convictions concerning God's power in the world, or the pursuit of exemplary holiness, or the cultivation of rigorous spiritual discipline? Is Woodward right in suggesting that for present-day Americans this is a matter of affirming a divinity within, "a way of saying that in the privacy of individual experience, where all meaning resides, I have come to believe in myself"? □

Luke Timothy Johnson *is the author of* Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel *(HarperSanFrancisco).*

Faces of the Church

Daniel Berrigan
THE BRIDE
Images of the Church
Icons by William Hart McNichols
Conveys the diverse faces of the church — each "an icon of divine love, a particular path of discipleship, a glimpse of the face of Christ written in human flesh, among us still."
— From the Introduction by MEGAN MCKENNA
20 color icons 1-57075-305-9 paper $22.00

Walter J. Burghardt
LONG HAVE I LOVED YOU
A Theologian Reflects on His Church
"Walter Burghardt, that wonderful weaver of words, has indeed crafted a rich tapestry of our church and our times. His voice is kind, forgiving, prescient, wise. His love for humankind during this tumultuous era shines through."
—PAUL WILKES
1-57075-296-6 paper $20.00

Michael H. Crosby
"DO YOU LOVE ME?"
Jesus Questions the Church
Highlights the tension between a model of the church that emphasizes the Petrine principles of apostolic authority and a model that emphasizes loving service and discipleship.
1-57075-236-2 paper $20.00

Cletus Wessels
THE HOLY WEB
Church and the New Universe Story
Sheds light on the startling oneness of the entire universe and the body of Christ called church and how the biblical symbols of creation, redemption, sin, grace, life and death, faith, hope and love reveal its meaning.
1-57075-302-4 paper $20.00

At your bookseller or direct
ORBIS BOOKS
Maryknoll, NY 10545
1-800-258-5838
www.orbisbooks.com
30 Years of Books that Matter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

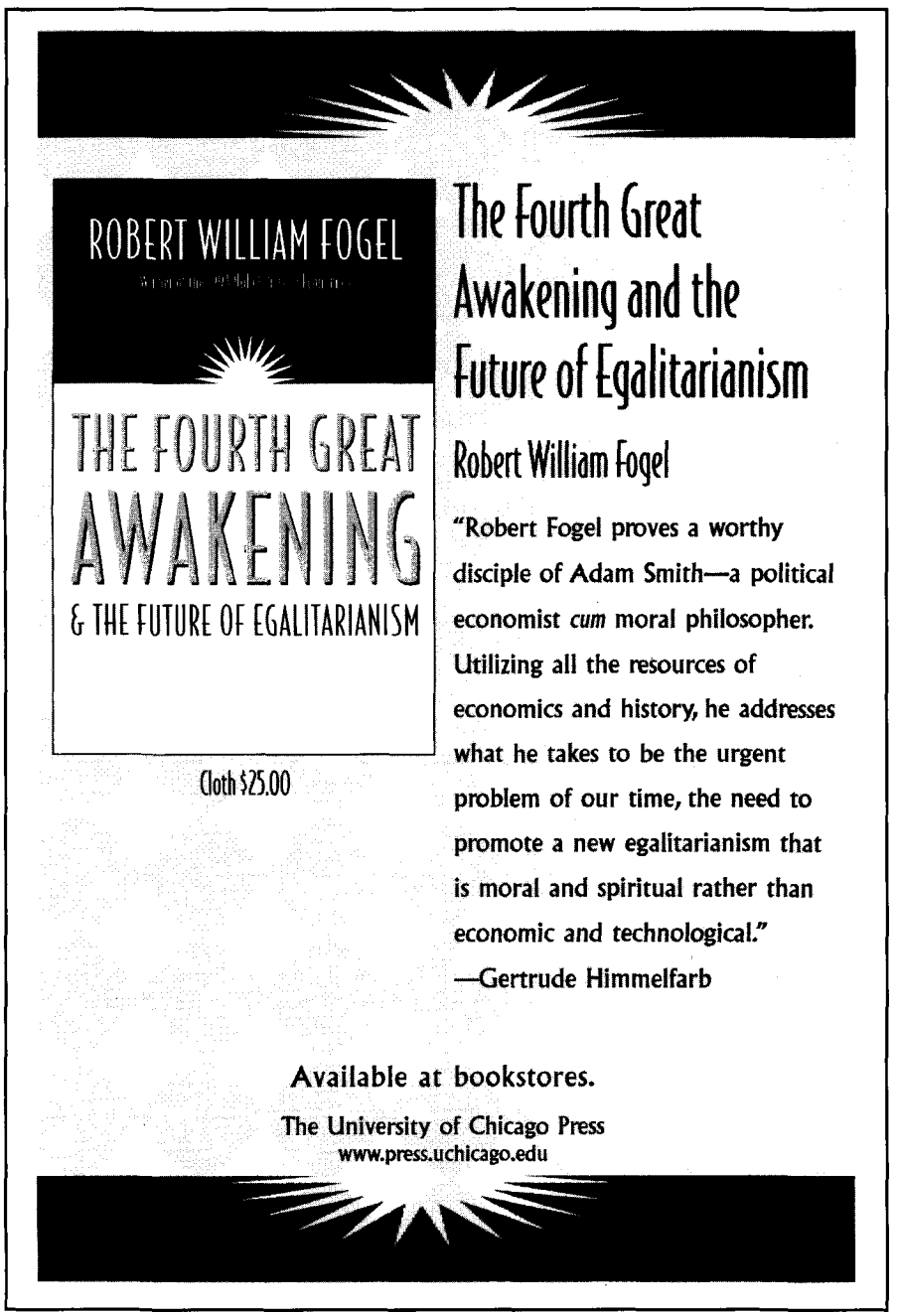
(Continued from page 4)

every single day, for that...is an invitation to violence." In this age which still sees so much violence your statement is certainly true.

However, in discussing the violence of abortion, you let the proverbial nose of the camel get under the tent. While the editorial is excoriating the movie for its utilitarian approach to morality, it offers, "Allowing legal access to abortion in cases of rape, incest, or when a mother's life is in danger, is a morally defensible position." Whereas, I will grant that an abortion to protect the life (N.B., the life; not the health) of the mother may be acceptable, albeit a very difficult choice, I fail to see why this violence should be permitted in the event of rape or incest.

Without a doubt these two situations are unspeakably traumatic for their victims. But is it not true that the child conceived as a result of a rape or incestuous relation is also a victim? The very fact that the mother wishes to abort this child makes it all the more a victim. Regardless of how the child has been conceived, regardless of who fathered it, does it not deserve a chance to live? Isn't it the son or daughter of God? The issue of abortion has been and will always be a devisive issue. As people of good will, regardless of our creeds, we must not forget the child.

PAUL MARX
Prairie Village, Kans.


ROBERT WILLIAM FOGEL
THE FOURTH GREAT AWAKENING
& THE FUTURE OF EGALITARIANISM
Cloth $25.00
The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism
Robert William Fogel
"Robert Fogel proves a worthy disciple of Adam Smith—a political economist *cum* moral philosopher. Utilizing all the resources of economics and history, he addresses what he takes to be the urgent problem of our time, the need to promote a new egalitarianism that is moral and spiritual rather than economic and technological."
—Gertrude Himmelfarb
Available at bookstores.
The University of Chicago Press
www.press.uchicago.edu

The editors reply:

In the abstract, Mr. Marx is right. But in a nation where abortion on demand has been legal for nearly thirty years, more than the nose of the camel is already under the tent. There is little possibility of seriously reducing the number of abortions or of enhancing respect for fetal life in our laws if pro-life advocates are unwilling to consider compromise. In that context, a prudential decision to support allowing for legal access to abortion in cases of rape and incest is morally defensible.

Anti-Catholicism

The disdain that *Commonweal* ["Anti-Catholicism?" April 7] has for the Catholic League needs neither explanation nor defense, but you do Father Timothy O'Brien a disservice when you say that there was no anti-Catholicism involved in the House Chaplain selection process. When he publishes his account of what happened, you will look more foolish than you already do.

WILLIAM DONOHUE
New York, N.Y.

The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

Report from Sudan

Thank you for the fine article "Eye on Sudan: The Forgotten War" by Patrick Jordan [March 24]. I fear that as fuel prices soar, with the Khartoum government controlling the oil fields in Southern Sudan, it will be even more "forgotten." Canada's Talisman Energy Firm, in spite of vehement protests by many religious and social organi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

zations, continues to extract Sudanese oil, funneling millions to the Khartoum government, which has stated publicly it will use the money to continue funding the war.

Having lived and worked in Sudan in recent years, it remains a mystery to me how a human tragedy of this dimension is allowed to continue with so little international concern. I was in Sudan in 1994, so near to Rwanda, where five hundred thousand people were massacred. Six years later, many outside organizations, leaders, and countries continue to beg forgiveness because they either "knew" or "should have known" it was coming, yet did nothing to stop it. It is never too late, and even though more people have already died in Sudan than in Rwanda, we can still raise our voices to effect some change.

I would like to offer one correction to the article. In writing of the ABC "Nightline" feature on Dr. Susan Nagele's work, Jordan mentions that the ABC cameras conveyed the plight of one Southern tribe, the Dinka, with whom Nagele has worked. While Nagele has worked with the Dinka for many years, ABC's cameras were showing footage of the Taposa and Nyangatom, two other Southern pastoral tribes, among whom Nagele now lives and works. The systematic destruction of the Dinka, and all Southern tribes, however, is exactly as Jordan describes.

MARJ HUMPHREY
Staten Island, N.Y.

A vote for candles

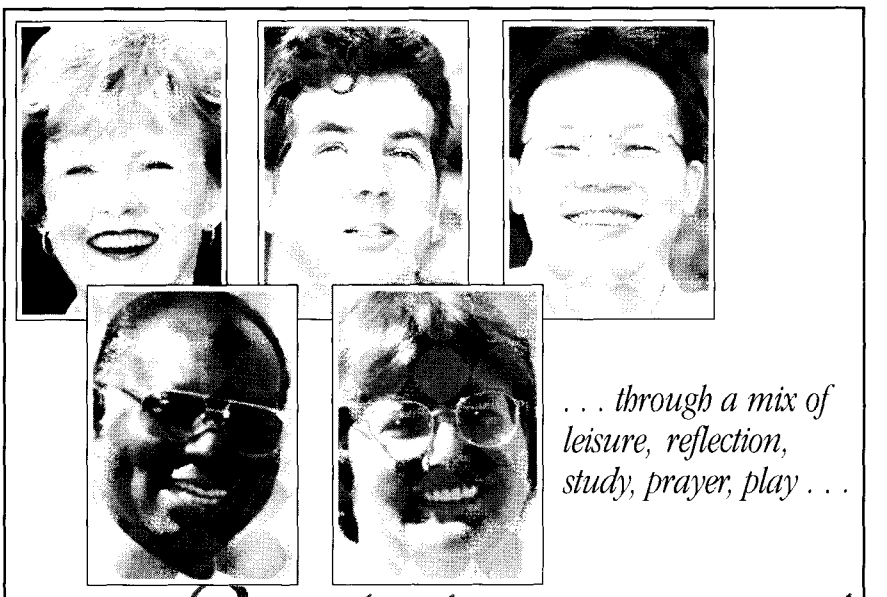
In "Better to Light a Candle" [March 24] Sidney Callahan speaks for many in questioning the aesthetic norms of contemporary Catholic culture. Perhaps those of us who are converts may seem overly sensitive to this issue, but it is wise to remember the initial lure of Catholicism often comes through the senses. Having endured renovated churches, artless translations, and sacro-pop music, it is hard not to think of our aesthetically misguided and undernourished spirituality as an Achilles heel.

Callahan says she doesn't want a "simple-minded imitation" of the past. Who does? But when concerns like hers are dismissed out of hand, as if preferences for votive candles or Gregorian chant somehow inevitably signal a dangerous theological drift, we shouldn't be surprised if thoughtful people despair. The desire for warmth, mystery, and transcendence is not regression. It's a human need which the church should make every effort to fulfill.

RANDOLPH NICHOLS
Lincoln, Mass.

European churches

Having just spent three weeks in France and Switzerland, and having visited many churches, I was struck by how little impact Vatican II seems to have had on the outward signs of change in the Catholic churches of those countries. Statues of saints, paintings, often of enormous size, and especially votive candles were everywhere. If it had not been for the new altar tables and lecterns, the reforms of Vatican II would not have been manifested.



. . . through a mix of leisure, reflection, study, prayer, play . . .

Sabbatical
for ministers
from the world church, a sabbatical that refreshes, stretches, reinvigorates

The Washington Theological Union's Sabbatical Program offers a choice of certificates, classes with distinguished pastoral theologians, a range of workshops, regular spiritual direction, days of reflection, social activities, all in a community of friendship and faith. Come for an academic year or a single semester.

Attractive on-site housing. Easy access to events in Washington, DC. Some financial assistance.

At the Washington Theological Union, today's ministers renew themselves for the church of tomorrow.

Washington Theological Union
A Roman Catholic School for Ministry
Call: 800.334.9922, ext. 5216

Sabbatical Office * 6896 Laurel Street, NW * Washington, DC 20012
Phone: 202.726.8800, ext. 5216 * Fax: 202.726.1716 * http://www.wtu.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How different, I thought, from our North American Catholic churches. Imagine my surprise when, upon my return and opening my *Commonweal*, I found Sidney Callahan ["Better to Light a Candle," March 24] lamenting the lack of votive candles. To her credit, she decries the excesses of the "art" I had just witnessed.

One exception stood out, however. It was a Protestant church in Zurich. Originally a monastery church, it had been modernized, brightened both in light and color, creating a wonderful warm glow. Add an altar table, tabernacle, and stations of the cross and you would have had a beautiful Catholic church, combining the best of both traditions.

In the end, I think Callahan answers her own question. It is the believers who inspire the places.

JOHN BORST
Dryden, Ont.

Say it ain't so, Richard

Richard Alleva ["End of the Affair," April 7] no longer your film critic! "Say it ain't so," Richard. Of course Erin Brockovich would put it more colorfully, more memorably, but no more heartfelt. In my opinion (which, to be truthful, the Roman curia frequently ignores), Richard is the best in the business. He has given *Commonweal* readers ten glorious years with his insights, allusions, breadth of knowledge, and grasp of the subject matter. He was simply nonpareil.

Richard, it was quite a ride, and I thank you for it. But where do we go from here? Won't you reconsider?

ANDREW GALLIGAN
Tracy, Calif.

Harry Potter's cousins

I enjoyed Daria Donnelly's column, "Hey, Harry Potter Has Cousins" [April 7] but wish she had also mentioned our family's favorite fantasy writer, Diana Wynne Jones, who I believe is unsurpassed for her originality, charm, and sheer power of imagination. She did the Harry Potter thing long ago in the Chrestomanci books, and has written many others, including *The Ogre Downstairs*, in which the children grow a hilarious crop of ancient Greek warriors; *Dogsbody*, featuring Sirius the Dog Star in canine form; *The Homeward Bounders*, a subtle riff on time travel; and, for older readers, *Fire and Hemlock*, an intense version of the Tam Lin legend.

STEPHANIE MARTIN
Newton Centre, Mass.

A Democrat first

Like Peter Feuerherd ["A 'Wing' and a Prayer," March 10], I enjoy "The West Wing." Unlike Mr. Feuerherd, however, I have no doubt how "this Catholic president views abortion." Bartlett, after all, is identified as a Democrat. Feuerherd's "willful suspension of disbelief" may allow him to believe the Democratic party of today could nominate anyone other than a prochoice candidate. Mine does not.

GENE VADER
Minnetonka, Minn.

On-line discussion group

Commonweal is sponsoring an e-mail discussion group until July 1, 2000. The group exchanges messages dealing with articles and topics presented in the magazine. To join, simply send an e-mail message to *commonweal-subscribe@egroups.com*

Happy e-mailing!

CLASSIFIED

RATES: $1.10 per word; 12-word minimum. Discounts 5 percent, 3 times; 10 percent, 6 times; 15 percent, 12 times. Advance payment required. Discounts and monthly billing available for repeat advertisers. For additional information call 212-662-4200 or write COMMONWEAL, 475 Riverside Dr., Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115.

Manuscripts Wanted

BECOME A PUBLISHED AUTHOR. Quality subsidy publisher accepting manuscripts. 1-800-695-9599.

In Quest of the Celtic Soul

BRIDGET MARY MEEHAN RETURNS to the land of her birth to give us an extraordinary view of the faith, myths, and celebrations of Ireland that are part of its spiritual heritage....

For more information visit the Web site: godtalktv.org, or call 703-379-2487; e-mail sofiabmm@aol.com

Executive Director

DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN seeks an Executive Director for its Pastoral Institute. The Pastoral Institute is responsible for both the ongoing education and formation of the clergy and the education and formation of lay ministers. Founded in 1967 as the vehicle for updating priests after the Vatican II, the Institute has recently embarked on developing a revitalized lay ministry preparation program.

The candidate must be a practicing Catholic with a demonstrated fidelity to the magisterium of the church, a master's degree or better in an appropriate discipline, significant diocesan or parish administrative experience, organizational and collaborative leadership ability, excellent communication skills, sensitivity to a multi-cultural environment, excellent educational planning skills, good interpersonal relations, and creative approaches to adult education and formation.

Salary and benefits are consistent with diocesan guidelines. Position available 8/1/00. Letter of interest and résumé by June 1, 2000 to Rev. Michael J. Hardiman, President, Pastoral Institute, 7200 Douglaston Parkway, Douglaston, New York 11362-1997.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DANCE MARATHON

Edward T. Wheeler

British novelist Anthony Powell died last month at the age of ninety-four. Although not well known in the United States, Powell is regarded as one of his generation's best novelists, favorably compared to his contemporaries and acquaintances Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and Henry Green. His reputation rests on his twelve-volume masterpiece, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (University of Chicago), a witty, socially acute chronicle of the fate of the English upper class as it unfolded over the course of the past century.

As coincidence would have it, I finished reading *Hearing Secret Harmonies* (1986), the final volume of *Dance*—the first volume appeared in 1951—on the day Powell's obituary appeared. Powell outlived by years the better-known members of his literarily illustrious generation, not to mention the prominent political, social, and academic figures of twentieth-century British history. *Dance* has been mined by critics who treat the work as a *roman à clef*. Powell, however, was adamant that he alone created the characters in his labyrinthine opus. The great delight of *Dance*'s length and style is the way in which those characters become a fictional society that any reader feels, well, privileged to enter.

Thousands of pages, seventy-five years in time, twenty-five years in composition: the simple details suggest the scope and the audacity of the program. Powell limits his range to that fictional terrain we are familiar with from so many British writers: Eton, Oxbridge, civil service, and the military, with the effects of the First World War everywhere apparent, and the coming of the Second World War the formative moment. The plot depends upon the emergence, withdrawal, and reemergence of a few key characters. The seasons and decades turn, some people die, some come back introduced by another who has no idea of a former friendship, old lovers appear on the arms of foreign generals, and the separation of meetings by thirty years makes juxtaposition of judgments inevitable. As the title *Hearing Secret Harmonies* suggests, there does seem to be a pattern to it all.

Consider the task Powell set himself: compose a work that is a form of fictional autobiography, and write it over the course of twenty-five years, taking it, if one looks to the future, where the writer has yet to live. All the perspectives are shifting as the narrator and his creator are themselves maturing. Style and viewpoints change, and the reader is made ever more aware of the effects of time on judgments, judgments that are trained on people who recur as partners in the dance of life. Nicholas Jenkins, Powell's narrator, is an extraordinary creation in his own right, especially in the way Powell creates a bond between the reader and Jenkins that seems almost like a collaboration as both uncover the patterns of the social dance, the changing fortunes of art, war, marriage, and industry that play out across *Dance*'s vast canvas.

Dance takes its title from the Poussin

painting that Powell sees as emblematic of his artistic vision: four nymphs dancing in a circle whose movements are both free yet coordinated. The allusions of the novel to painting, music, and literature bring a haunting sense that great works offer us forms, if not of understanding, of coincidental reflection. One of the work's extraordinary scenes occurs in *Temporary Kings*, the eleventh volume, when Jenkins visits Italy to attend a conference. The dance of time has assembled the familiar principals and the action—intrigue, scandal, changing sexual partners, and the looping entry of a new dancer—is prefigured in the ceiling painting of *Candaules and Gyges* by Tiepolo. Jenkins's unobtrusive reflections, for he is most often spectator to the dance, are wry and allusive: life lived within the sense of artistic pattern.

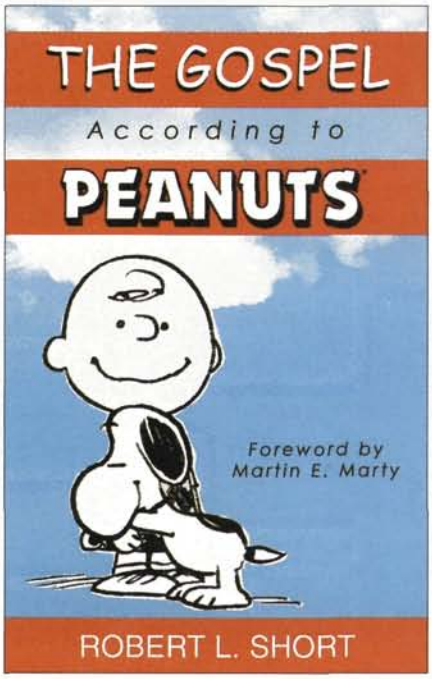
Before the chronicle ends there are a suicide, an international scandal, and Jenkins's own carefully qualified reporting of the testimony of those who claim to have been witnesses. This is all accomplished with brilliant satire, and in Pamela Widmerpool, another recurring central figure, Powell has created one of fiction's great female characters. Her latter-day husband, then widower, Kenneth Widmerpool, is the pivot, if any character can be, about which the epic swings. We follow Kenneth as school boy, student, lawyer, financier, soldier, politician, peer of the realm, and even as a septuagenarian dancer in cult rituals. His career is the one that retrospection—the great pleasure of finishing the novel—allows us to see as choreographed by the author in time, and that provokes a desire to reread the whole again, to put into place how the fatal events unfolded.

It just won't do to lose touch with these remarkable people. □

Edward T. Wheeler *is dean of the faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spring Reading



Thirty-fifth anniversary edition!

The Gospel According to Peanuts

Robert L. Short
With a new foreword by Martin E. Marty

"I am always amazed that Charlie Brown and Snoopy can prompt some good theological discussions."

—Charles M. Schulz, July 1999

Short's book has found a place in the hearts of many readers, with sales now totaling more than ten million copies. This anniversary edition features a new cover, a new interior design, and a new foreword by Martin E. Marty. Whether coming to the book for the first time or taking a second look, a delightful experience awaits in this modern-day guide to the Christian faith, fully illustrated with Peanuts.

Paper $14.95 (Canada $21.00) • ISBN 0-664-22222-6

Religion and Literature

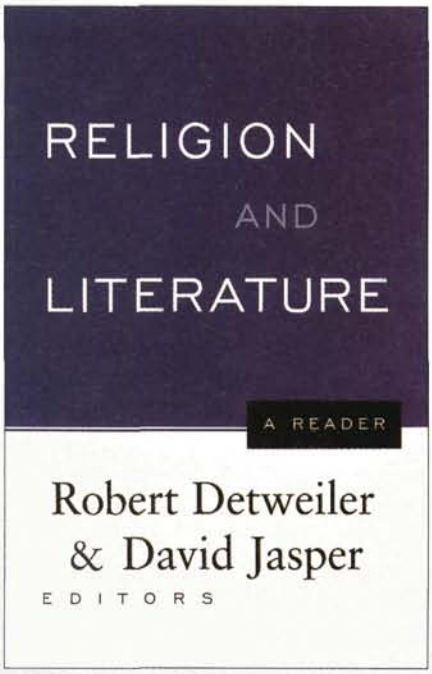
A Reader

Robert Detweiler and David Jasper, editors

The common origins of religious expression and literature

A focus on the Western literary-religious tradition, bringing together eighty-six readings from classical literature, the Bible, Western classics, and contemporary literature. Texts included are from Ovid, John Milton, Franz Kafka, Martin Luther, T. S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, William Blake, Flannery O'Connor, Augustine of Hippo, Mark Twain, Elie Wiesel, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Merton, John Updike, Paul Ricoeur, Paul Tillich, Søren Kierkegaard, and many others.

Paper $29.95 (Canada $45.00) • ISBN: 0-664-25846-8



WESTMINSTER
JOHN KNOX PRESS

At your bookstore, your Cokesbury bookstore or
Call: (800) 227-2872 • Fax: (800) 541-5113
E-mail: wjk@pcusa.org • Web site: www.wjk.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED